The Hidden Road

By Elsie Singmaster

Dorothy Stoddard

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BY

ELSIE SINGMASTER

AUTHOR OF "BASIL EVERMAN," "ELLEN LEVIS," "BENNETT MALIN," ETC.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge

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The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE · MASSACHUSETTS
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

TO

MY MOTHER AND FATHER

THE HIDDEN ROAD

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PART I

THE HIDDEN ROAD

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PART I

I

PHEBE STANNARD stood at the window of the room which she shared with her cousin Beulah in the house of her Uncle Heimbach, the blacksmith. As a member of the programme committee of the Christian Endeavor Society, Beulah had to be at church before opening time, and Phebe had the room to herself. Holding at present no office but that of organist, she might wait another twenty minutes before starting. She needed no preparation; she knew the hymns, she would have said, backward.

Leaning against the window frame, she looked across the garden of Elma Ridinger to the open fields. It was June and the sun was still an hour and a half above the bright horizon. From Elma's garden rose the scent of Annunciation lilies and from her porch the scent of honeysuckle; in the nearest field a sprinkling of daisies enlivened the clover and beyond the wheat was golden and almost ripe. In the middle distance, beside a grove of noble trees, rose the irregular mass of a blast furnace.

Phebe was restless, and she walked to the other window which looked down over Heimbach's beautifully kept garden. At the far end, partly hiding a group of sheds, stood a symmetrical English walnut tree which had been planted almost

sixteen years ago, by accident rather than by intention, on Phebe's first birthday, and which had been known since as "Phebe's tree."

Phebe had graduated from the Millerstown school a year ago. She was of medium height with a boyish figure whose squareness made her look shorter than she was. She had abundant, bright brown hair and fine gray eyes. Her beauty, if she could be said to have beauty, lay in her healthy color, in the shape of her head, and in her profile which was made individual and interesting by a firm, slightly prominent chin.

Her mother had been the sister of Heimbach, her father a superintendent of the Millerstown furnace, of pure English stock, but none too sound principles. After a brief residence he suddenly departed to another furnace town to which Heimbach followed him, escorting his young sister, and remaining until he had witnessed a marriage ceremony. When Phebe was less than a year old, her mother died, and Heimbach brought her home to grow up with his own child. An incurable wanderer, Stannard went West to drift from one mining camp to another, prospecting for gold, lead, and copper, with varying success. He was confident that some day he would "strike it rich," and then, he assured Heimbach, Phebe should have everything. Meanwhile he sent only occasional contributions toward her support. Phebe should have gone away to school a year ago, but he had not supplied the necessary funds.

Finding no relief from restlessness in gazing at the walnut tree, Phebe turned and began to dress, walking, meanwhile, up and down the broad, matting-covered room as steadily as her occupation would allow. It was a pretty room, large and well furnished. There were two comfortable rocking-chairs, a bureau with a mirror which tilted conveniently, and a shelf on which were Phebe's and Beulah's schoolbooks.

Phebe took off her dress and hung it in the closet and brushed and braided her long hair which she wound round her head like a coronet. Her coiffure completed, she examined it in the mirror with the aid of a hand-glass. She looked only at her hair and not at the outline of her head, being as yet unaware that it was beautiful.

"Up evenly!" she said. "For once." It was her pride that she spoke with very little Pennsylvania German accent.

Having exchanged her black footwear for white, she slipped over her head her best dress which she had recently made with Beulah's help and fastened it slowly, still frowning. If Heimbach had seen her expression, his own eyes would have darkened with anxiety.

"The little one is thinking about school," he would have said. "It is a shame that she is not already there."

But Phebe was not thinking about school; she was thinking about a man. She had had thus far three persons to love, her uncle, her aunt, and her cousin Beulah, but they sufficed no longer; she saw too clearly that in intelligence they were her inferiors, and she needed not only to love, but to adore. The object of her affection must of necessity be some one who came from elsewhere, and who was well educated. In her childhood she had thought often of her father and had written to him regularly, and had expected him to come for her in a magnificent automobile, the modern equivalent of a golden coach. But the rarity and brevity of his responses, the fact that he sent her no Christmas gift, even though she always manufactured for him some little remembrance, and, finally, her increasing absorption in herself dimmed the sense of filial obligation. Once she sent him her picture and received in return his own and the astonishing observation that she looked like him. She could see no resemblance to her blooming youth in this eager, weak, and weary face.

The man of whom she was thinking and upon whom she was prepared to pour the fervor of her first love was Hilarius Hersh, the telegraph operator. She was prematurely developed in an unfortunate direction, and her thoughts were not those of virginal innocence. The frankness of speech in the village and the familiar touch of men who had teased her in her childhood had injured her gravely, perhaps slightly perverted her. She hated certain recollections, but they worked upon her subtly, filling her mind with unwholesome images. When she thought of Hersh, she thought of intimate hours, though she had never so much as touched his hand.

She believed that sexual love was the end of existence; that those who did not experience it had nothing. It was the substance, not the adornment, of life, and beside it no other human affection — neither the love of child for parent nor of parent for child nor of brother for brother nor of friend for friend — had vitality or strength. If she had been able to analyze her own experience, she would have been fortified in her opinion. When she had begun to love Hersh, she had begun to study, and during the last year of her schooling she had not failed in the least particular.

Having fastened the last hook, and hearing the brisk clock in the kitchen strike six, she went down the stairs, stepping lightly and holding her head high. A princess might have been dressed more elegantly, but she could not have worn more immaculate clothes over a more immaculate body. Pushing open the screen door, she stepped out on the porch, where sat her uncle and aunt. Heimbach was short with a broad, sinewy frame. His dark face was smooth-shaven except for a small, pointed, outstanding beard which quivered with the motion of his chin. He frowned often, but his frown was not that of ill-nature, but of anxiety, and the anxiety was not about himself, but about his family. In his

clean but grime-encrusted hand he held a fan with which he sent the air flying vigorously in the direction of Aunt Cassie.

Mrs. Heimbach had a lovely face, and an enormous, misshapen body which made her life an hourly, unmitigable martyrdom. She might live for a year; she might live for ten; but she would never be free from pain. Thus far she had refused, to the approval and the admiration of her physician, all alleviating opiates, for which, however, the day was approaching. She was unfailingly patient and cheerful, being convinced that no heavier burden would be placed upon her than she was able to bear. One could see in her, to the comfort and edification of one's soul, spirit rising above flesh.

Her large brown eyes looked at Phebe affectionately. Phebe was not her kin, but she loved her dearly. She spoke in round, unctuous tones, using the English vernacular of Pennsylvania German villages and Phebe answered in English of a better quality.

"Beulah went this long time already."

"She had to lay out the books," explained Phebe. "Everything must be right when Beulah's the manager."

"Who leads the meeting?"

Phebe could scarcely pronounce the words, "Mr. Hersh."

A twinkle came into Heimbach's eye; he believed that Hersh used perfume and applied some stiffening unguent to his magnificent pompadour. He did not, however, put his amusement into words; he loved speech, but he hated to utter it.

"Come here," said Mrs. Heimbach.

Merely for the joy of touching Phebe, she adjusted a fold of her white dress. Then, self-conscious and holding her head high, Phebe went up the street.

In spite of herself she glanced at the porch of the hotel where Hersh frequently sat. At present only Alexander Crusen, the superintendent of the furnace, was there, smoking and reading. A light-haired man of medium height and slender figure and steady gaze, he was, in his self-sufficiency and independence of others, not unlike Phebe's father, but he was more clever, better educated, and far more stable and ambitious. He did not lift his head as Phebe went by, being as little interested in her as she was in him. He intended to be a consulting metallurgist, and he had constantly in mind the possibility of discovering incidentally some source of vast wealth, perhaps a virgin or supposedly exhausted mine whose unsuspecting owner he could buy out at a low figure, and he was reading at this moment of Thomas Bazin, who laying a railroad had found diamonds, and of Schöpperle, who seeking coal had found copper, and of Albertus Rick, a common miner, who had cunningly acquired the ownership of a deep bed of iron.

Phebe spoke to all the Millerstonians sitting on their porches, but she was glad when she had passed the Gaumer house under its tall pine trees and the road ran between long fields. In the chapel which was an annex to the church, she found only plump and wholesome Beulah. Beulah was Phebe's height, but a great deal stouter. Her hair and skin were dark like her father's, and her features were his, but her lovely expression was her mother's. She adored Phebe more than Phebe adored Hersh; sometimes she looked at her and grew pale, so great was her awe of this alien creature. This evening she was filled with gayety. When Phebe entered, she seized her by the arm and cried, "Good-evening, Sister Stannard!"

"That's enough, Sister Heimbach!" answered Phebe with a little scream. "You'll lame my arm, then who will play?"

She encircled Beulah's plump waist — no one could feel

anything but affection for the sweet, unselfish creature — and the two crossed the little chapel. The floor was covered with buff oakum carpet and the walls were wainscoted with yellow pine and painted yellow above. The shallow, straight benches were yellow, the broad pulpit was yellow. The only dark tints were those of the walnut organ and the frame of a picture of Moses, holding the tables of the law. All the yellows were brightened by the flood of horizontal sunshine.

"The leader is coming fast up the road," said Beulah, looking out the window.

Phebe took her seat on the organ stool and began to pull out the stops, her body trembling. Preoccupied with his importance, Hersh entered, carrying a Bible and a pamphlet and lifting his hat. He was tall and well built — on the whole a fine figure of a man. His hair was his glory; it was thick, black, and very curly, and he frequently tossed his head like a fine horse or a proud lion. He wore a little black mustache which he handled constantly. Ascending the platform, he opened his Bible and, without looking at Phebe, laid on the organ a list of hymns. Uncle Heimbach was right; he shed a strong odor of carnations. The members of the society were entering by twos and threes, and Phebe began to hunt for the first hymn, her hands shaking.

"Let us begin our meeting," said Mr. Hersh, "with Number Forty-Five."

Number Forty-Five was a song, rather than a hymn, in which the singers bade each other stand up for Jesus, and assured each other fervently that the time would not be long. The singing was true and hearty, and Phebe supported it with all the force of her knees and hands and voice. Between the last two stanzas she played an improvised interlude which showed decided musical talent. She and Beulah had had

music lessons, and their teacher, who came from Allentown, had said a few weeks ago that Phebe must find a new teacher — she had taught her all she knew. Phebe loved to play; the motions of her hands, lifting and turning delicately and sliding accurately from key to key, were like caresses.

She remained on the organ stool throughout the meeting. Mr. Hersh was not eloquent, and, being able to fill with exhortation and an original prayer only a very short period, he called for many songs. Phebe was enraptured — if only this handmaidenly service might continue for hours! When the roll was called and it was incumbent upon her to rise in response to her name and repeat a verse of Scripture, she stood for a second as though dumb, unable to return immediately to reality. Beulah was terrified — was Phebe going to fail? But Phebe could not fail.

The pastor, Mr. Weygandt, arrived in time to offer a closing prayer. He was a godly old man who preached simple, positive, easily comprehended, and profitable sermons. He was old-fashioned in many ways, and wholly incapable, both physically and mentally, of the complex, active life of a modern city pastor; he could neither address women's clubs, nor be a leader of Boy Scouts, and he would have thought politics and the labor problem and the cure of tuberculosis totally unadapted to sermonic treatment. He did not realize that he was one of the saints of the earth, nor did his congregation appraise him correctly.

As members of the choir Phebe, Hersh, and Beulah did not go round the church to enter with the gathering congregation, but stood waiting until it was time to enter through the door beside the pulpit. They did not realize that they blocked the path of Ambrose Weidner, a tall, poorly dressed youth who was deprived, by his poverty and his origin and his shyness, of social intercourse with his fellow Endeavorers.

He came from Weidnerthal, a lonely valley across the spur of the little mountain where his dissipated and depraved father, George Weidner, farmed in a small way near an abandoned mine which, like others in the neighborhood, had once yielded a considerable profit. When the leasing company failed, the property returned to the possession of George, improved by a stone house which had been built for the superintendent. Ambrose's mother, who had belonged to a respectable family in the village, was long since dead.

Phebe often regarded Ambrose curiously. He was, she thought, none too clean, and she conceded the difficulty of cleanliness in a household where the work was done by a half-witted Hungarian girl. It was queer that Ambrose should come to church, and still more queer that he should have passed the teacher's examination and have been assigned a school. Strangest of all, however, was his intention to be a preacher. Phebe liked ecclesiastical ceremony, especially when she had a leading part in it, and she loved the dreamy, peaceful mood induced by preaching, but she depended as little upon religion as Crusen; she wished to live, not to save her soul. Ambrose's pious intention was at once amusing and repellent. She was certain that he disapproved of her, and sometimes she looked at him defiantly. Now, realizing that Ambrose was trying to pass, she laid her hand on Beulah's arm, and pushed her a little to one side.

"We're in the way."

She was aware of a look of dumb gratitude from a face far above hers. Ambrose was on the threshold when the pastor inquired suddenly, "Where is Willie Kuhns?"

"Isn't he here?" asked Phebe. Willie was the important functionary who pumped the church organ.

"I heard he had the measles," said Hersh.

The pastor looked at Hersh, believing that he would offer

to take Willie's place, but he was never more mistaken. Shocked by his lack of consideration, Phebe came to the rescue with speed.

"Ambrose," said she, looking round quickly and speaking in a tone, which if it was not contemptuous was in her confusion at least discourteous, "will you pump the organ? It's easy. You just pump. It's time to begin when you hear the hymn announced. You just move the handle up and down. You will, won't you?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Ambrose in a whisper.

Mr. Weygandt went into the church and Phebe followed, then came Beulah and Hersh, and after them Ambrose. The sun had set, and though the room was still bright, the hanging lamps had been lighted against the coming darkness. Mr. Weygandt stepped inside the chancel rail; Phebe stepped to the elevated platform where some of the choir had assembled and took her place on the organ bench; Beulah and Hersh took their places among the choir. Phebe had a pang of fright lest Ambrose forget that the *Gloria Patri* was chanted; she thought of him impatiently as he crouched in the dusty cubby-hole. But he did not fail her; the wind filled the bellows before she needed it and she gave no more thought to Ambrose or to the service. She thought of Hersh.

The opening service concluded, she stepped down to a chair in the second row of the choir. To her right were two basses, and at the far end of the row three tenors, one of them Hersh whose robust presence she could feel, though she could not see him without leaning forward. Directly before her sat Beulah; by breathing heavily and exhaling she could stir the curls on Beulah's neck and make her shiver with embarrassment. Beulah had a shy regard for William Neuweiler, one of the basses, and she was afraid of disgracing

herself in his eyes. He was a good-looking, substantial youth, descended from a long line of farming and store-keeping ancestors. He had brown hair, a white skin, and eyes which were almost incredibly blue.

Beside Beulah was the Heimbachs' neighbor, Elma Ridinger, a tall, red-haired woman dressed in black. Her aged husband had left her well provided for, and it was with difficulty that she maintained the proper expression for a mourner. She meant to marry again as soon as decency would allow, and Phebe was no more acutely conscious than she of the proximity of the eligible Hersh.

Next to Elma, on the front row, sat Lydia Yohe, who mourned in truth, not for a dead husband, but for an absent lover, Harvey Emmert, who had jilted her when her wedding clothes were made, her *Aussteir* completed, her house furnished, even the fire laid in the stove. He had fled away from her and away from Millerstown, and had become a wanderer forever. Lydia's face seemed to be carved from a creamy marble without grain. Her black hair was unmixed with a thread of gray and her dress was unrelieved black. Her countenance never changed; it shone neither with illumination from within nor with the reflection of light from without. The sight made Phebe shiver. To be jilted, to remain unloved, uncompanioned — what a terrible fate!

Tremendous Sarah Ann Mohr was an old woman, but she had never ceased to sing, and her voice had not failed as badly as one would expect. She rose when the hymn was called and stood like an architectural detail, a mammoth pillar at the corner of the choir platform. There were those who scolded because she was not made to see that she was too old to sing, but for these objectors there were plenty of answers. She was the one constant member in the uncertain equation of the choir, which was now divided by musical

or personal jealousies, now subtracted from by abrupt and sometimes angry departures.

Hilarius Hersh's eyes, like Phebe's, were fixed upon the row of necks in front of him, and he meditated upon two, the plump neck of Beulah and the crape-veiled neck of Elma. He was also aware of the invisible figure of Phebe whose musical skill he admired. He meant erelong to select a wife, and of the three young women he considered one seriously.

Phebe listened to the sermon, and some of the pastor's declarations remained in her mind. The text was from Hosea, "And she shall follow after her lovers and shall not overtake them," and the sermon dealt with the fruitless chase of mankind after the unsubstantial, unabiding pleasures of the world. But against the slow melody of the minister's long sentences Phebe composed a livelier tune. She thought of herself and of Hersh; she imagined him walking home with her in the delicious, warm June darkness. He had thus far paid her no special attention, but she was perpetually sanguine. Perhaps he would invite her to take his arm, perhaps he would kiss her at parting. She had been kissed many times, but it was as an unwilling, struggling, sometimes screaming child. She did not count that real kissing. She laid her arm across her breast as though to hide its expansion.

When the sermon began to seem long, she looked idly about among the congregation. She saw Mrs. Kauffman whose three children had died in a week from scarlet fever. She saw pretty, downcast, "ruined" Mary Ainey with her unfathered little boy beside her. She saw Vinnie Most, twisted with rheumatism and never without pain. She saw stout Alice Hill whom the women avoided, but who had a pleasant smile, and nice manners and beautiful clothes.

Despair came upon her when the benediction was pronounced and she had to sit playing while everybody went about his

business. Even Beulah forsook her, flying toward the door to speak to Mrs. Kauffman. She completed the postlude with a loud Amen, and the noise of the pump continued — Ambrose was giving her full measure. Under ordinary circumstances, even though she did consider Ambrose a Pharisee, she would have bade him come forth from the cubby-hole, chiding him for having remained in the airless, dim place during the whole of the service, and complimenting him upon the vigor with which he pumped. In a gay mood she would have remembered a funny story of Willie Kuhns who fell asleep and left her without wind. But she closed the organ with an impatient bang and went down the aisle, leaving Ambrose to issue unthanked from the dusty hole into which she had thrust him.

At the door, she found Beulah, and beside her — oh, wondrous miracle! — a tall figure.

"Here is Mr. Hersh," said Beulah in a voice which seemed shaped for a laugh. "He says dare he walk along with us."

Mr. Hersh had used the word "escort," but Beulah would no more have used it than she would have painted her smooth cheeks.

"I guess so" answered Phebe, stepping a little apart from Beulah so that Hersh might walk between them. He laid a hand gently on each arm; he was not a very positive and certainly not in the least a presuming person. Beulah's arm crooked quickly into a comfortable resting-place for his hand — Mr. Hersh was nothing to her. Phebe's elbow bent more slowly, and her forearm when it came to horizontal was tense.

"It is a nice evening," said Hersh smoothly. His head was far above the heads of his companions, and he seemed to be addressing his affected syllables to the upper air. "It is warm, but not uncomfortably so. There is no humidity,

and humidity is what makes high temperature difficult to endure."

"I think it's hot," said Beulah with decision.

Blushing for Beulah's lack of social grace, Phebe changed the subject quickly.

"What will you do if they put back the Sunday evening train? Will you have to be at the station then?"

"They have no intention of restoring the train," answered Hersh. "I have it from good authority."

"That's fine," commented Beulah. "If I go to bed early, it always wakes me." Suddenly she drew her arm away. "*Ach*, I forgot my paper with the lesson for next Sunday, and I must lead! Will you wait here? Or go on if you want to."

Hersh gallantly declared that he and Phebe would wait, and Beulah left them standing by the fence with Millerstown before and below them, illuminated by the moon. In the distance the bleeder of the furnace burned like a rosy star. There was clover in the neighboring field and its odor was like that of grape blossoms. The loneliness, the loveliness of the night, and Phebe's soft elbow under his hand, bred in Hersh a tender sentimentality.

"Do you like nature?" he asked.

It was the question above all others calculated further to enslave his companion.

"Indeed I do!" said Phebe earnestly. "I sit at my window and look out sometimes long after my cousin is asleep. Sometimes I walk by myself on the mountain road."

"Perhaps," began Hersh — then he paused. He had joined the cousins because Elma Ridinger whisked past him without a word. He went on in honeyed tones, "Perhaps sometimes when I have off we can walk a little on the mountain."

Phebe was dumb with delight.

"Will that be acceptable?"

"Oh, yes!"

Before he could suggest a time for this romantic excursion, a panting breath announced the return of Beulah.

"I just got in before he locked up," she said breathlessly.

When Hersh took her arm with a tightened clasp, she was amused; she had suffered from the same sort of familiarity as Phebe, but she had rewarded the embraces with a stinging slap and had forgotten all about them. Hersh needn't think he could take liberties with her!

At the gate Hersh said good-night, though Heimbach got to his feet with hospitable intent. Phebe went indoors at once, and Beulah sat down on the step.

"Who was that?" asked her mother placidly.

"That was Mr. Hilarius Hersh," Beulah minced her words, and one saw Hilarius — height, bulk, pomaded hair, little mustache, and all.

"What!" exclaimed Heimbach. "Is he your beau or Phebe's?"

"Neither," giggled Beulah. "He just walked along."

"Did you have a good sermon?" asked Mrs. Heimbach.

"Fine," answered Beulah positively. "Fine."

"I think I'll go to bed," said Mrs. Heimbach. "You and Phebe should go, too, on account of the washing." Her full voice commiserated Beulah and Phebe.

Upstairs Beulah saw the most beautiful creature in the world sitting at the window, the moonlight shining upon her.

"I'll fix Mom's bed for her," she said. "Then I'll put the wash to soak. It's no need that two should undress and put on an old dress and then undress again." She would have liked to kiss Phebe.

Phebe sat still looking out over the fields toward the furnace. There was a muffled roar and a wide flare of crimson flame as the bell was lifted and a new charge dumped into the stack. Presently a steel car would creep out of the shed, climb behind a puffing engine to the top of the cinder dump, and send molten rivers running down the side of the mountain of solidified waste. If the muffled roar had had a different tone, Phebe would have lifted her head alertly, knowing that something was amiss.

The heavy scent of lilies and honeysuckle in Elma Ridinger's garden, the beauty of the night, and her own emotions changed her bliss into uneasiness and unhappiness. She saw again the women about whom she had speculated in church. Elma Ridinger and Sarah Ann Mohr were widows — their tragedy was slightly mitigated. But Lydia Yohe had been jilted, and Mary Ainey had been betrayed, and Alice Hill, in spite of all her lovers, had no husband. Vinnie Most — but Vinnie's age and deformity recalled Phebe to herself. Misshapen and wrinkled, Vinnie must be sixty, and she was sixteen and she was straight and her skin was like satin. She laughed at her foolish fears.

Suddenly she heard the sound of music. Crusen sometimes took a short cut through the fields, and came up a little alley on the other side of the house. It was he whom she heard now. He was whistling "Drink to me Only with Thine Eyes," and each note was clear, round, perfect, like his words in speech. Phebe's pleasure restored her to herself. Hersh had walked home with her — he had walked, she knew, in no real sense, with Beulah — and he had taken her arm. She laid her hand upon the honored elbow. He had invited her to walk with him on the mountain road — could she have selected for herself a treat promising above all imagination it would have been a walk with Hersh on the mountain road.

II

It was Sunday evening, and Aunt Cassie lay in her bed in her pleasant room at the front of the house, and Heimbach sat by the window. The intense heat exhausted Cassie, and her great body weighed her down. She could see, above the houses and the hotel on the other side of the street, the top of the little mountain against the soft eastern sky now tinted with rose from the sunset. She could see in imagination the lower flank of the mountain and the intervening fields of golden wheat rippling in the breeze.

"I guess Neuweiler has his wheat in," she said presently.

"He began to cut the middle of the week," answered Heimbach.

Cassie saw the golden stubble-field.

"I wonder if William will give a farmer," said she, knowing all that went on in Beulah's mind.

"His father will farm, and William is to be in the store. He likes store-keeping."

"So," said Cassie. If William was in the store, Beulah and he could live here. Beulah's mind had not traveled nearly so far.

Her thoughts returned to the mountain and she saw the long tassels of the chestnut trees.

"I hope it will give a good crop of chestnuts. My mom could keep them fresh till Christmas."

Her thoughts wandered still farther, over the flank of the mountain into a lonely valley.

"Ambrose Weidner comes all the time to church. They say things are bad there."

Heimbach leaned forward, letting his fan swing between his knees.

"George brought the ploughshare to be sharpened yester-

day. If his horse did not have more sense than he, he would never get home. He was to fetch it again, but he didn't appear." Heimbach could see Crusen sitting on the hotel porch. He distrusted him deeply because he reminded him of Stannard. "It is six months since we heard from Phebe's pop," he said uneasily. "I wrote him this long time that Phebe should go to school."

"What will we do if the money don't come for Phebe?"

Heimbach knitted his brows and began to rock rapidly back and forth.

"I look at it this way. Beulah don't want more education; she wants to stay here and keep house. Education is a trouble to her. But with Phebe it is different. She takes education. Now, if the money don't come, I think we should explain to Phebe that we will do our best for her and when she has a good position she can pay it back."

"But can you get this money together, Pop?"

"I will have to borrow a little, perhaps, but I have faith in Phebe that she will pay it."

"Yes, well," said Mrs. Heimbach. "How I hope Phebe never finds her pop out!"

"She will if we don't hear soon. He pretended to be so fine and so English." Heimbach looked up the darkening street, asking irritably, "Where are these girls?"

"They're together somewhere. Where one is, the other is."

"They are not to walk with Hersh!" exclaimed Heimbach. "That *Fratzhans!* (dude) Beulah should have more sense."

It was on the tip of Mrs. Heimbach's tongue to say, "It isn't Beulah he walks with," but she remained silent. She was worried also, and she stirred uneasily under the light coverings. Suddenly she winced; she could no longer express her emotions by involuntary movements of her body.

At half-past eight there was a knock at the door, first a timid stroke, then a louder pounding. Heimbach had wrought himself into a state of intense nervousness, and he went downstairs quickly. In a moment he came back.

"It is poor Ambrose," he explained. "His father has sent him for the ploughshare."

"Well, get it for him," begged Cassie. "If it is Sunday."

"I'm going to," answered Heimbach. "But you will be alone."

"I like to be alone," declared Cassie.

When she could no longer hear his heavy footsteps ringing on the brick pavement, she turned, a little to the right, a little to the left, and back again.

"Surely I can still get up!" she said desperately to the empty house and the quiet night.

She heard light footsteps and laughter, the creak of the gate, and the moving of chairs on the porch. There were nearer footsteps on the matting, and a white figure showed itself in the gloom.

"Are you alone?" The words were exclamatory, distressed.

"Your pop just went this minute to the shop. Where is Phebe?"

"On the porch."

"Is Hersh with her?"

"Yes, Mom."

"When Pop comes, he won't like it."

Beulah stood at the foot of the bed, silent, her head bent, her tender heart filled with unresentful anxiety. They had not wanted her, and they were glad to be rid of her.

"You tell Phebe to come to me, Beulah."

"*Ach*, Mom, I don't like to!"

"Tell her I sent you."

Beulah went slowly down the steps up which she had

leaped, and, opening the screen door, looked out into the darkness.

"Phebe, Mom says you shall come to her."

Phebe obeyed unwillingly, and Hersh rose slowly. The summons had found them clasping hands, timidly on Phebe's part, not very ardently on Hersh's. Phebe had expected to be kissed, and she was outraged at this interruption. Was Beulah jealous? But the sight of Aunt Cassie's prone figure recalled her to herself.

"Don't you feel so good, Aunty?"

"Uncle had to go to the shop, and Beulah has her work. I thought you would sit by me."

Cassie had no intention of making her request sound appealing; she was one who always pretended to be better than she was. But her voice took on, in spite of her, a new tone.

"Of course I will!" said Phebe. She sat down by the window and listened with all her soul for Hersh's departing footstep, her heart filled with confused emotions of tenderness and desire and disappointment. The moon peering over the corner of the house revealed her face clearly to the anxious eyes on the bed, and, if she had cupped her hand behind her listening ear, or leaned out of the window, she could have betrayed herself no more completely.

Aunt Cassie lifted soft, resisting hands against the tide.

"You're to go to school in September, Phebe; it's not to be put off any more."

The words were a funeral knell. Then Stannard had written! But she did not want to go; she wanted to stay here; she needed no more education to be a good wife. It was true that Hersh had come no nearer intimacy than the cool clasping of her hand, but she was certain of his love.

"You're to choose a Normal School," said Cassie. "Uncle, he thinks you should not go to such a Pennsylvania German one."

"Beulah can't take care of you alone!" objected Phebe.

"Aunt Rosie will come when Beulah can't get any more along."

Heimbach opened the screen door, calling, "Are the girls in, Cassie?"

"This long time," answered Cassie. "You can go now, Phebe."

Phebe rose and went toward the bed. Her common sense got the better of her foolishness; she knew that in this house were only affection and desire for her welfare, and she bent her lips to Cassie's lovely, placid face. But Cassie put up a protesting hand.

"You oughtn't to kiss me," she said in a new, harsh tone.

Phebe's motion was arrested and all her senses became alert. A time approached, they all knew, when things would be worse than they were, and there was for the first time an unmistakable taint in the warm air.

"Go to bed," ordered Cassie. "Tell Beulah I've gone to sleep."

Forgetting her own woes, Phebe held the soft hand against her warm, clean, sound, young breast.

"What can I do for you, Aunt Cassie?"

"Nothing."

"Your hair is wet!" cried Phebe, her hand on Cassie's brow.

"It's nothing," insisted Cassie. "Nothing except that I'm a little warmer than sometimes. Go to bed."

In her room Phebe thought for a few minutes with awe and tenderness of Aunt Cassie, but she was too inexperienced to visualize the cruel future. She heard Beulah preparing for the morning's washing, but she did not go to help her. Beulah would only say that she could do everything alone.

A half-hour ago, she had been blissfully happy. She had a feline sensitiveness to touch and she did not realize that Hersh's hand was not an ardent hand, that Beulah's caresses were much warmer. The interruption had left her unsatisfied and uncomfortable; a mysterious and delicious cup had been snatched from her lips. She heard voices and a loud laugh from Elma Ridinger's porch, and she hated Elma because she was free and independent. How shameful to laugh like that when her husband had not been dead six months!

Her only consolation was her engagement to walk with Hersh. On Wednesday afternoon Hersh had a holiday, and he had suggested that she meet him a mile and a half above the town where the wood road leading to Weidnerthal left the main road. It was a somewhat irregular proceeding, but Phebe was beyond a consideration for conventions.

She believed that she lay awake far into the night, and she was astonished and half incredulous when she heard in the morning that Cassie had had a bad turn and that Heimbach had run hastily for the doctor while Beulah sat beside her mother. In spite of this attack, Cassie insisted that she felt no worse than usual, and she rose and came downstairs, her drawn face pale with a strange yellow paleness.

In the middle of the morning Heimbach came home to hear her assurance that she had no pain. She sat in the cool kitchen, hearing from the out-kitchen the sound of splashing water and cheerful voices. She had beside her on the table a glass of water and a fan and the Allentown "Morning Call," and she smiled at Heimbach bravely.

"When I went for the doctor at one o'clock, that fool of a Hersh was sitting with Elma Ridinger on her porch," he said in profound relief. "I could hear them going on."

Cassie listened with a faint smile.

"I would be sorry for her if she got him, or for him if he got her," she said gently.

"I would rather he got her than our Phebe," growled Heimbach, his black beard quivering.

III

PHEBE sat on a fallen tree at the entrance to the barely perceptible wood road. When there was no sound of passing, it was easy to fancy one's self in the depths of the forest. Near by an expanse of boggy ground marked the source of the rill which trickled down the mountain-side, joined other rills, meandered across the meadows, and then flowed into the Swabia Creek and the Little Lehigh. The sun, shining in through gaps in the foliage, illuminated tall, rose-colored joe-pye weed, masses of white angelica, and spikes of scarlet lobelia. All was rich, luscious, unfaded; only from the scarcity of bird songs could one guess that summer was rapidly passing.

Three weeks ago Phebe had walked with Hersh into the woods. He had come late and the interview was short; moreover, he had seemed absent-minded. The second Wednesday was rainy, and last week, though Phebe had been on hand before the appointed hour, he had not appeared. He explained that the station agent required his presence, and Phebe was satisfied. His explanation, however, was not the truth. Elma was considering the purchase of an automobile, and she had asked him to give her his opinion of a car at a dealer's in Allentown.

Again Phebe had come early. She loved to be in the woods and to be alone and to be expecting Hersh; she could not conceive a richer combination of delights. Imagining that she heard footsteps, she looked quickly over her shoulder. But the sound was in the woods; it would never occur to Hersh to

steal up from an unexpected direction and surprise her. She rose and looked boldly round, and it seemed to her that she saw a shadowy form. She moved instantly toward the opening in the fence. In the road she would be safe; there was always some one to be seen either ascending or descending the steep slope.

She was convinced that she had imagined the footsteps and the shadowy figure, and she returned presently to the fallen log. Sitting with her chin in her hands, she remembered that this was the road which led to the Weidner house, and that upon it Ambrose went back and forth. She pictured him in a storm with the thunder crashing and the lightning stabbing through the trees as if to find him. She saw the trees denuded of their leaves and lashed by sleet, and Ambrose trying to keep his footing on the ice. Thinking of him she was not afraid, but in a few moments she remembered his father and rose uneasily and looked back again over her shoulder. She wished that she might see without being seen the demented creature who was his mistress and his slave. The thought of Ilka excited her, and she stood perfectly still, staring into the woods.

After a while, when not a leaf had stirred, she sat down. It seemed to her that an hour had passed, but she reminded herself that time spent in waiting was always long. Suddenly a cold chill passed over her. Suppose Hilarius should not come! But he *must* come! He had failed her the last time, and soon she was going away. Her trunk had been bought; her wardrobe, made by Vinnie Most with her assistance and Beulah's, was almost finished; her room had been engaged at the Leesburg Normal School. In all these preparations she had had a secret and ardent hope that she might be the heroine of a romantic marriage and that her outfit might serve for her wedding. She was now past seventeen, and girls frequently married at sixteen.

Presently she began to pace up and down, determined to cover a certain distance twenty times and confident that by the end of her patrol Hilarius would be here. But when she had completed her twenty journeys, she was still alone. She saw the engine and the cinder-ladle climbing the distant bank and knew that it was four o'clock. Two hours had passed instead of one.

In stubborn unwillingness to accept disappointment, she took up again her restless tramp, and no sooner had she reached the end of her beat than she heard unmistakably the approach of a human being. She had put up one of the bars of the fence and now some one dropped it with a crash. Color flamed in her cheeks and childishness fell from her — she was a woman hastening to her lover.

Then she stopped short. It was not Hersh at the gap in the fence; but a far less welcome creature, Beulah Heimbach. She stood with her back turned, looking contemplatively down toward Millerstown as though she preferred discovery to announcing her presence.

If she could have shrunk back, Phebe would have hidden behind a tree, at least until she could control her thoughts. Had Beulah come to spy on her? Or — Phebe's hands tightened into fists — had Beulah come to see Hersh? Beulah thrust herself upon them, her arm supported Hersh's right hand while Phebe supported his left. For an instant, for the first time in their closely associated lives, hatred flashed between them like a sword.

The sword was in Phebe's hand, not Beulah's. Beulah began to speak as soon as she realized that she was observed. Her cheeks were flushed, and her voice was strained.

"I was walking past and I saw you. I thought I would walk along home with you."

Phebe did not advance a step. Her furious eyes made

Beulah tremble. Beulah was lying — what business could she have on the mountain?

"There are clouds in the west," ventured Beulah in a low tone.

Phebe had seen the clouds and knew that they were at present negligible.

"Who is then with Aunt Cassie?" she asked.

"Sarah Ann. She came and she said I should go out a little."

Phebe caught her breath, tried to speak, stammered, and began again. She dropped into the vernacular; its words were stronger, its phrases more eloquent.

"This was a funny place to walk out a little! And I don't see how you could well see me when I was way back there!"

Beulah offered no defense; she merely bent her head while the storm raged. To go to the stake for Phebe would be easier than to tell Phebe her shocking news.

"I did see you, though," she said at last, trying to speak steadily. Phebe believed that she was trying to hold the ground — had she a later appointment on this spot?

"Well, are you coming down with me, then?" she demanded, determined to make Beulah show her honesty of purpose.

Still Beulah did not move. She would rather tell her news here than on the highroad.

"We needn't go just yet," she said. "Sarah Ann will stay yet awhile."

For the only time in her life Phebe mocked Beulah.

"Well, I won't stay yet awhile," she said, and sprang out into the dusty road.

With the alacrity of a soldier on parade Beulah stepped to her side. But no soldier on parade was ever so terrified. She knew now that she could not tell Phebe; she could only

comfort her after the blow fell. The distance between them widened; they were in a moment on opposite sides of the road, Phebe and Beulah who walked from preference with their arms round each other. Apart they went down the hill, indifferent to the eyes of an amused teamster who was starting up. Phebe said nothing; she was too unhappy, too angry, too sick with disappointment. Beulah was afraid to speak; she trembled as they drew near to Millerstown. There the dire news floated like a mist penetrating everywhere; they would not be able to set foot on the sidewalk without becoming aware of it. Poor Beulah was aghast.

Mercifully the calamity was made known before they reached the village; to this degree was the wind tempered to shorn Phebe. The mountain road drops to the level and meets the pike, which is Millerstown's main street, and on this road an automobile approached slowly and somewhat uncertainly, driven by a woman in a black dress and a floating black veil. It was a new, shining car, and its glittering blackness made it a fit chariot for the mortuary monument at the wheel.

Phebe saw at first without comprehending. The car had passed; her thoughts were not yet ordered; then Beulah's sharp, angry voice — sharp and angry for poor Phebe's sake — put them into order.

"She'll train him! He'll have to walk the chalk now."

"Who are they?" asked Phebe. But she had turned pale.

"Hersh," said Beulah, choking over the answer. "And Mrs. Elma Hersh. They were married this forenoon. I guess they took this time because Ridinger is to-day six months buried. This is her new Ford; she'll run it up many poles, I bet."

Phebe's white face demanded without words, "How do you know?"

"John Knauss telephoned out to the hotel," said Beulah; "he was in the Court-House by accident when they got the license. He said the people laughed at her black clothes."

Beulah glanced at Phebe and saw that she was not going to fall, but that instead she was setting briskly out toward home, her gait stiff, like that of a walking doll. Before they reached Elma's house, Beulah seized hold of Phebe's straight arm and began to tell a silly story and to shriek with laughter.

"So they hadn't money to get in and they had walked such a long way, and Helena's mom she said, '*Ach*, I will make a way!' and she took her big shawl pin and she made a hole in the tent for Helena to look in. But she stuck a man, and when Helena put her eye to the hole, he hit Helena through the tent. She fell on her back and that was the end of the circus for Helena."

Beulah pushed Phebe away and pulled her back, and pushed her away again. The two had the appearance and the sound of silly, ribald schoolgirls, but in Beulah's laughter there was a shrill note which was that of mockery, not of mirth, and which carried to its intended goal. There are few persons who do not suffer a moment of dismay just before or just after marriage, and Hersh had such a moment when he heard these wild yells.

The two girls entered the house through the front door and Phebe climbed the stairs, her hand on the banister. Each time it lifted from the shining surface it left an imprint in moisture. Beulah went through the hall into the sitting-room and there sat down, and her mother looked at her and she looked back. Cassie was fanning herself with long, slow motions; the depression preceding the approaching storm registered on this sensitive body.

"Where is Sarah Ann?" asked Beulah.

Cassie answered in short sentences.

"She went. Some one came and said she had company. I said she should go. I thought you would come soon."

"Phebe is upstairs," said Beulah. "We saw them in the road, riding along."

"Yes, well," said Mrs. Heimbach tenderly.

Beulah went into the kitchen and began to prepare supper. She considered the making of Phebe's favorite dishes, but she shook her head; there were agonies which food did not relieve. After a while she stole up the stairs and listened. Everything was perfectly quiet. She visualized poor Phebe lying on the bed, face downward; she did not suspect that Phebe lay face downward on the floor. When she went downstairs Heimbach was in the kitchen.

"In a few minutes, Pop. By the time you are washed, the things will be on the table."

Heimbach was thinking neither of food nor of washing. He turned his thumb toward the house next door and lifted his eyebrows. The two gestures said, "Have you heard the news?"

Beulah nodded. Her father alluded occasionally in anything but a gallant spirit to the color of Elma's hair. He uttered now two sharp words — the second was "red-head"; the first brought a sharp "Ei yi!" from Cassie. Then he pointed upward. Again Beulah nodded. He shook his head, as if to shake away tears, and retired to the porch with a basin of hot water.

IV

PHEBE appeared at the door of her uncle's house, closed it behind her, and stood for a moment on the steps. It was half-past seven on the evening of the first day of September and darkness had fallen. She stood very still and looked about, up at the sky where the stars were shining, down to

the right toward the lights in the store and the post-office and the barber shop, and across the street to the hotel where there were four bright windows, two in the barroom and two upstairs in Crusen's room. To the left she did not look. From the porch of Elma's house echoed a short, spiteful laugh. It had no connection with Phebe — Elma never suspected Phebe's devotion, and to Hersh Phebe had become part of a vague, pleasant, irrevocable past; but Phebe started as though she had been stung. She crossed the porch and walked rapidly away, the laugh sounding in her ears. It seemed to say, "Jilted! Jilted! Jilted!"

To-morrow she was to go away. Her trunk was packed and most of her farewells were said. The money from her father had, she supposed, reached Uncle Heimbach. She did not want to go to school; but then she could not think of anything she did want. The controlling impulse of her life had been destroyed; she had no desire to improve; there was no one in whose eyes she cared to appear well or to do well.

She walked to the end of the village and back swiftly, shivering as she passed the houses of Lydia Yohe and Mary Ainey and Vinnie Most. At the house of Alice Hill she saw an automobile and heard a man's laugh.

Before one lighted window she stood still. It was the house of the watchmaker, a little old man who came to the Heimbachs' occasionally to repair an ancient, unreliable, and highly valued clock. From the time that Beulah and Phebe had been able to look over the edge of the table, they had watched him enchanted, and trusted his teasing promises.

"You see all these little wheels? Well, if I have four left over, I will make you a wagon, and if I have two left over, I will make you a cart, and if I have one left over, I will make you a wheelbarrow."

Remembering, Phebe smiled. The smile hurt, but it did her good. They were big girls before it dawned upon them that no wheels would ever be left over. How pertly they had scolded the little man! Suddenly she began to cry. She would like to thank the Heimbachs, to tell them that she had never missed a home, had never lacked for anything. During the last month they had been mercifully silent; they had not mentioned Hersh or Elma, even to denounce them, and she wished that she could utter her gratitude. But her tongue was tied.

In the post-office she found a letter from her father, and its possession gave her courage to go home and face the family in the bright sitting-room where Heimbach was reading his paper, and Cassie and Beulah were setting the last stitches in her dresses. She came blinking into the room, suspecting that they ceased speaking of her when they heard her step.

"I have a letter from Father," she announced, sitting down beside them. "I guess he writes to say 'good luck.'"

Stroking his beard uneasily, Heimbach watched her tear the letter open. The sight of Stannard's handwriting filled him with a sense of impending trouble. He saw Phebe knit her brows — what had the man said? He forgot that he had allowed Phebe to suppose that the funds for her education came from Stannard. He and Cassie and Beulah had had a conference in which they agreed that the money was to be given, not lent, to Phebe.

"She has been treated bad enough; she oughtn't to have a debt hanging over her yet," Beulah had declared with tears.

"I don't know what my father means," said Phebe suddenly.

"What does he say?" asked Heimbach, frowning.

"He says, 'I hope you can still make arrangements to go to school and that the delay has not inconvenienced you. I

enclose a money order for this year's expenses.' But the arrangements are made! My clothes are bought and half the tuition is paid. Who paid it? You weren't going to send me, Uncle?"

"Why, yes," acknowledged Heimbach as if he had been caught in a crime. "Why not?"

"You were going to pay for me when Beulah stays here and works?"

"I don't want to go," protested Beulah. "It would make me sick to go. I couldn't go."

"It's all right, Phebe," said Aunt Cassie in her pleasant, even tone. "This was talked over and settled. Now, Beulah, you sew the buttons on this waist and I'll put the button-holes in that one." She held out her pale hand under the light. It quivered delicately.

Phebe remained silent. She wished that she could say, "I don't deserve this kindness, this affection. I have been irritable and ungrateful." But she could not speak. A band round her throat silenced her as though she had quinsy, until Heimbach opened the flood-gates with a word.

"I've been thinking of having the English walnut in the yard cut down," he announced in a practical tone. "It shades the garden and it never has a nut on it. I—"

He got no farther; a sharp cry silenced him.

"Oh, no, Uncle!" cried Phebe. "Oh, don't cut it down, don't cut it down!"

All three looked at her amazed.

"I've been a fool, I know," cried Phebe. "I don't deserve any more than you've done for me already. But don't cut the tree down! Don't change anything before I come home! I can't think of you without it. When I'm far away and think of you, the yard would look all bare. Oh, don't cut it down!"

A long silence succeeded Phebe's outburst. Aunt Cassie looked at her, her gaze that of a Madonna wise in sorrow and tender toward the world. Beulah stared with bright eyes. Her expression was like her father's, only his was fiercer. He got to his feet, crushing the paper noisily in his mighty hand. The time had come, he believed, to speak.

"The tree shall never be cut down," he announced solemnly. "I didn't know it made anything out to you, Phebe. It shall stand as long as I live. But you haven't been a fool, Phebe." He changed into German, and in German swore, embroidering the name of Hersh.

"Now, Pop!" said Cassie with a kind of tremulous relief.

"You needn't say, 'Now, Pop!'" thundered Heimbach. "For two cents I'd thrash him on the street."

Beulah was pale with delight. "Go ahead, Pop!" she urged. "Say it, Pop!"

Heimbach subsided into his chair.

"He doesn't need anybody from the outside to thrash him," he said, returning to English. "He'll get thrashed, never fear! Forget him, Phebe; if you think of him, scorn him. You'll get a man some day that will be a prince to this one."

"I don't want any man," sobbed Phebe, half laughing.

But Uncle's belief that she deserved one was heartening. It softened the ringing in her ears, but still she heard it faintly, "Jilted! Jilted! Jilted!" She believed that she would hear it forever.

PART II

PART II

I

THE rising-bell woke Phebe at six-thirty. She could see in the pale light shining through the transom a room as large as that which she shared with Beulah, bisected by a partition which ran two thirds of the way to the ceiling. In the windowless inner division were two bureaus and a washstand, two chairs, and a single and a double bed. Into the outer room were crowded a large table, a bookcase, three straight chairs, and three rocking-chairs. Beside Phebe in the double bed lay Mary Klinger, her face hidden on her arm, her unbraided black hair in a tangled mass; across a narrow space slept Wilhelmina Herr, smiling beatifically toward the ceiling, her yellow-brown curls spread out like a halo. Neither stirred at sound of the rising-bell.

Phebe had lived with them for two months, but she had not learned to like them. Mary was short and dark and sullen, and Phebe suspected that she was pleased because people thought her disagreeable. She was careless in her dress and in her personal habits. Wilhelmina was tall and she had a broad face. If she had held herself erect and quiet, she would have been imposing, but she twisted her body as though to screw her way to the attainment of her purposes. Besides attending all the services in the school, she held a prayer-meeting each morning in her room. She had made a vow that she would address each of the four hundred women students on the subject of conversion, and in this design she was opposed by a mischievous clique who held giggling con-

ferences in which they recounted their successful evasions. Mary Klinger did not belong to this organization, but her resistance to Wilhelmina's activity was equal in vigor to all of theirs combined.

Phebe rubbed her eyes drearily. She had the same thoughts when she closed them at night as when she opened them in the morning; in spite of her uncle's scorn and all her own efforts, she could not banish her aching tenderness for Hilarius. She was certain that Elma Ridinger had used some base underhand method to attract him, and Beulah's last letter fortified her in this opinion. "They fight next door," wrote Beulah. "It is something fierce."

She found the routine of school tiresome, the work hard. If Mary Klinger, who had time to spare, had given her a half-hour's help in the evenings, she would soon have found herself even with her mates, but Mary ignored her, and Wilhelmina, whose sowing by all waters left only brief periods for study, expected to be assisted rather than to assist.

Having rubbed her eyes, Phebe slipped from bed, her anxiety about a geometry lesson accelerating her naturally rapid motions. She gave no encouragement to sorrow by idleness. She braided her hair in the dim light and pinned the braid round her head. It was a season of outstanding puffs, but Phebe still followed her own fashion.

When she lifted the pitcher, she found it empty. Wilhelmina should have filled it, but in this matter also Wilhelmina depended upon the devotion of her followers. Slipping a wrapper over her nightgown and treading carefully in her thin-soled slippers because the floor was splintering, Phebe went down the long hall, which ran the length of one of the outer wings of the vast E-shaped building, and opening a door stepped out upon the iron platform of the fire-escape which served as a passageway to the bathrooms in a semi-detached

tower. The raw air of the November morning penetrated to her body, and the first coolness was not unpleasant, but in an instant she began to shiver. She filled the heavy pitcher and returned. A few lights were beginning to show through the transoms, but there was as yet no daylight.

Mary was yawning, but still in bed, and Wilhelmina was upon her knees. Wilhelmina's hands were clasped, her face was lifted, her lips moved silently. Swiftly completing her ablutions, Phebe seized her clothing and went into the study to dress. Having lit the Argand burner, she sat down to her geometry.

In the room she had left there was no communication except yearning glances. Wilhelmina had determined to conquer Mary by affectionate importunity. She had determined also to conquer Phebe. She came in and stood with one hand on the back of Phebe's chair.

"You'll surely join us this morning?"

Phebe shook her head; she had been caught once. She was not unhappy at church services in the town — the size of the building, the singing, the skill of the organist, and the presence of strangers steadied her, but when in this little room, Wilhelmina led in "Stand up, Stand up for Jesus," she almost strangled.

"Will you tell me why you won't?"

"I don't like religious meetings where there are unmade beds," explained Phebe.

Wilhelmina was about to say, "The rooms shall be in order," but that would necessitate earlier rising and this sacrifice she was not prepared to make. She said instead, "The Bible says, 'Where two or three are gathered together.'"

Phebe lifted her head and quickly lowered it. Her nose almost touched Wilhelmina's.

"I've got to study," she said. "I'm not here to hold prayer-meetings."

Wilhelmina stroked her hair.

"Oh, Phebe, I yearn over you!"

Phebe ground her teeth together; — if she could only send out stinging bristles against the caressing hand! When at sound of the breakfast bell Wilhelmina hurried through the untidy bedroom followed by Mary, Phebe flung up the window, and turned back the covers of the beds. When they came back they would shiver and scold.

She was almost the last to enter the huge, many-pillared dining-room in the middle wing of the E. In the hall where the stream of boys and girls converged, there were opportunities for whispered colloquies, and she looked scornfully at a few lovers who walked slowly, gazing at one another desperately with one eye, and watching with the other the monitor at the doors. The closing of the doors was final; a teacher might knock humbly and gain admittance, but a student who was late must go unfed.

Phebe entered with a frown. Fortunately she was at a table where there were students alone and no teacher at the head to insist upon polite conversation. She ate with downcast eyes — the manners of the boys opposite her were atrocious. Having finished, she hurried back to the fourth floor, closed the window, made her bed, and taking her books fled to the library on the second floor before the pious friends of Wilhelmina arrived.

In the chapel, which was in the central wing above the dining-room, she avoided all glances, though the young men looked at her with admiration. She was indifferent and she was preoccupied with a fine pipe-organ which she longed to play. She had kept so entirely to herself that even her musical gift remained unsuspected.

The principal, Augustus Todd, entered the broad platform from a rear door. He had taken the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and resented the omission of his title, and to the students the omission was unthinkable. He was tall and dark, a handsome, pattern-made man with good looks, but without distinction. The single feature which gave character to his face, a selfish, thin-lipped mouth, was hidden beneath a black mustache. He had enormous vanity about his appearance and he was late because he had paused to look into a mirror placed in the dressing-room for the convenience of lecturers or singers. He was a little uneasy for fear that he had been seen by Miss McGrath, the teacher of music, who was seated at the organ waiting to begin the hymn. He had often narrowly escaped detection, but temptation continued irresistible.

Miss McGrath, a tall, thin, spectacled woman of thirty-eight with a positive manner, was an accomplished pianist, and a person of general culture. She was the only teacher who made friends among the older families in Leesburg in which there was an intellectual circle, and she went out to dinner and was sent home in beautiful cars and escorted by gentlemen in evening clothes. Her popularity was a constant source of envy to Todd, who had only a limited acquaintance in the town. He restrained all expression of his resentment, however; she was an excellent teacher, industrious, unsentimental, and businesslike, who must be kept at all hazards.

Though Miss McGrath played the piano brilliantly, she played the organ wretchedly. Her reading was accurate, but she had no organ technique and she did not use the pedals or vary the tone. She played unwillingly, succeeding a departed teacher of history who had been organist as well.

Todd's uneasiness made his reading of the Bible jerky

and irregular, and, aware of his imperfect performance, he called for the Lord's Prayer from all the school instead of offering an original prayer. As he led, his composure was restored. Against his eyelids he saw himself conducting a morning service in a select, luxurious school for boys, the head-mastership of which he coveted.

His opening eyes observed with pleased attention a well-featured, intelligent, and unhappy face. He could not remember Phebe's name, but he believed that he saw ability in this steady gaze and this firm chin. As the students filed to their classes, he marked her as one who could promote his own success. It had recently been declared that Normal School graduates were uncultured and narrow; that they learned how to teach the elements, but were given nothing else, and Todd was anxious to refute this accusation by way of drawing attention to himself. He declared that a graduate who had been faithful to his work could enter the sophomore class of college, and he was on the outlook for a few students who might do what the majority assuredly could not.

This newcomer looked promising. If she was unhappy, he would dispel the cloud by an appeal to her ambition and by what might be called, for the want of a better term, the light of his presence. He had studied adolescent femininity, and he knew how to create a blaze without being in the least heated himself. He was a married man with a clever, homely wife whose intellect he admired and whose judgment he trusted in all things.

Phebe was aware that Todd was looking at her, but his glance signified nothing. She left the chapel, went downstairs, and following a long boardwalk entered the recitation hall and the geometry classroom. There she recited successfully and felt a faint satisfaction. The gap between her and her mates was closing.

As she left the room, she saw Joseph, the mannerless office boy, looking for a student. Everybody watched to see whom he would summon to be admonished or to receive bad news — nothing else was of sufficient importance to interrupt attendance upon classes. When he spoke to Phebe, every one stared at her.

"Dr. Todd wants you in the office."

"Me!" said Phebe blankly.

"Yes, you," answered the boy rudely, wondering whether Phebe had failed in her lessons or had sat up after hours studying and hiding her candle under an umbrella. Perhaps she had been meeting men students or other men in ice-cream parlors, or exchanging a word in a trolley car or at the railroad station.

Phebe was too badly frightened to resent his impertinence. She had one coherent thought — Aunt Cassie must be worse. She flew along the boardwalk and entered the office with scarlet cheeks and panting breath, and there was directed to a chair by Miss Underhill, Todd's secretary.

Miss Underhill resembled Miss McGrath in figure, but her aim in life had stamped her features with a different expression. She had one purpose, the preservation or reconstruction of the appearance of vanished youth. She rouged skillfully, had her hair waved once a week, and followed the latest fashions. In office hours she was a silent, efficient machine. She was less offensive than Joseph, but she was equally lacking in manners. She did not lift her flying hands from her typewriter, and her direction to Phebe was given merely by a motion of her elaborately coiffured head. She felt no obligation to explain that Todd was for the moment engaged.

Phebe did not take the chair indicated to her, but approached Miss Underhill.

"Did a telegram come for me?" she asked excitedly.

Miss Underhill continued her steady clicking. It was not her business to answer the questions of students, especially those who were summoned because they were idle or stupid. She looked hard at Phebe, and asked above the sound of her machine a rebuking question:

"Did you expect a telegram?"

Phebe frowned — why couldn't the woman answer civilly?

"I asked you whether a telegram came for me!" she said hotly.

Miss Underhill's hands remained poised in air; she was dumbfounded. As she said in a sharp voice, "That's no way to speak here!" Todd appeared from the inner room, having dismissed his visitor through another exit. This visitor was Mary Klinger, but a different Mary from the one known to Phebe. She had heard from Todd that she looked like an ambitious and sensible girl from whom great things might be expected and she walked on air.

Todd looked at his secretary and then at Phebe.

"What's the trouble?" he inquired, pulling his mustache.

"I asked if there was a telegram for me and she wouldn't tell me," burst out Phebe furiously. "My aunt is sick, and I'm always anxious about her."

"There's no telegram," said Todd soothingly. "Come in here, please."

The secretary glared at the closing door, hoping that Phebe would get what she deserved. She patted the large puffs which covered her ears and went on with her rapid clicking.

Todd bade Phebe sit down.

"You say your aunt is ill?"

"Yes," said Phebe tremulously. "She will never be any better."

"Have you been taking care of her?" If Phebe were to

be called away, it would be useless to rouse her interest in his project.

"I've been helping," explained Phebe. "Now her daughter and her sister take care of her."

"Your parents are not living?"

"My father's in the West."

"He supports you, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"You look to me like an ambitious and sensible girl." Todd said the words with beautiful smoothness. It was the fifth time he had pronounced them that morning. "You would like to continue your education, I fancy."

"Yes," said Phebe in a low and not very hearty tone. Once she had wished, for the sake of winning the regard of Hilarius, to know everything, and in a little while she had accepted the fact that in order to win the regard of Hilarius one need to know nothing.

"You would like to enter college, perhaps?"

"If I could," said Phebe.

"There are many ways of providing for one's self, financially," explained Todd. "When you've finished here, you can enter the sophomore class, if you've been diligent. I'm interested in you. You entered with a handicap, but you've almost made up your deficiency. I believe in you."

The hot color surged over Phebe's face. This man was the principal of a great institution, he was looked up to as though he partook of divinity — she took a proud, sore satisfaction in his compliment. She forgot the gross humiliation she had experienced at sight of Hilarius and his bride and lifted her head. Self-respect brought in its train self-confidence, and suddenly courage, ambition, good spirits, — all her characteristic qualities promised to be hers once more.

But there was restored to her something besides courage and ambition; the deep, overstimulated spring of her life was again quickened. Looking down, she saw Todd's hand, strong, shapely, well cared for, lying on his desk and it seemed to exert a magic influence. As though drawn by a string, Hilarius Hersh moved to the background of her mental stage, and Todd, who was in many respects like him, took his place.

She was impelled instantly to some act of gratitude, of devotion, even of abasement. Fortunately she did not obey her impulse or she would have laid her lips to this beautiful hand. Instead she burst into hateful, uncontrollable tears, of happiness and unhappiness, of shame and of relief.

"I'm sure you can do it," said Todd gently. He did not suspect the heat of the fire which he had deliberately kindled; he believed that she was overwrought by her alarm about her aunt. "You'll try, won't you?"

Phebe nodded. Being again Phebe, she would almost kill herself trying. She saw herself studying for long hours and she made a bold request.

"I think I could do it if I could room alone. I have two roommates in 412. There's a little unused room at the end of the hall — if I could only have that!"

"It isn't well heated," objected Todd.

"I wouldn't mind," declared Phebe. "There I could study."

"We'll see," promised Todd. "Do you wish me to have you excused from your next class?"

Phebe wiped her eyes. "I don't wish to be excused from anything."

Todd held the door open for her, and when she had walked out, a little unsteadily, he sat down in his chair and stroked

his mustache; then he took a little mirror from the drawer above his inkstand.

"She'll make good," he said with conviction. He rose and approached the outer office, walking slowly and looking over his shoulder. Opposite the door hung a large framed photograph whose glass formed a serviceable mirror, and in it Todd studied his handsome, frock-coated figure. Then, opening the door, he addressed Miss Underhill.

"Overwrought," he said briefly. "Studying to catch up with the juniors and anticipating her aunt's death."

Once more Miss Underhill patted her outstanding puffs. She looked hard at Todd, not with admiration or regard, but with envy of his smooth skin and his dark hair whose genuineness she doubted. She uttered a brief comment upon Phebe.

"Crude," said Miss Underhill.

II

THOUGH it contained six hundred young people, the great building was quiet. It was Saturday afternoon in December, and a cold rain was falling. From the men's wing, a few students went to the library, some to study, others to watch the girls who drifted in with purposes divided in like fashion. There was hot water in the bathrooms, and shrouded figures stepped gingerly across the chilly fire-escapes to the little cement-floored cells which steamed like Russian baths. In two rooms, their wicked employment unsuspected, groups of boys played cards, trembling meanwhile at the certainty of expulsion if they were detected. Skilled in methods of deception, they had placed their tables carefully so that they could not be seen either through the transom or the keyhole. A few students on both sides were cleaning house, and outside their doors were piled chairs and cushions.

Phebe was in the little room for which she had begged. It measured about ten feet by ten, and the narrow bed and the washstand and table and a single chair left little space for Phebe. She sat by the window, looking out through the rain at a grassy but otherwise unornamented campus. Her room was in order, her lessons were prepared for Monday, and she had donned her best dress. Her expression had changed; these were the eyes which had looked upon Hilarius Hersh at the Christian Endeavor meeting. She was hoping, not without fear of disappointment, for a rare treat. Emboldened by the favor of Todd and by success in her classes, she was about to go to Miss McGrath and ask permission to play the organ.

Three narrow steps led to the hall, and down these she barely saved herself from falling. Seeing Wilhelmina standing at her door, she smiled at her; so changed was her heart that she had gone voluntarily to one of Wilhelmina's prayer-meetings. As she approached Miss McGrath's room on the first floor, she heard her playing. After a moment she tapped gently and the door was opened.

"What is it?" Miss McGrath asked kindly. She liked Phebe for her erectness, her neat hair-dressing, and the modesty and good quality of her clothes.

"I came to ask a favor," said Phebe in her clear tones, the color coming and going in her cheeks. "My name is Phebe Stannard. At home I am organist in church, and I thought perhaps I could play here a little when nobody is studying."

"Was your organ a pipe-organ?" asked Miss McGrath, who blushed each day for her inefficiency.

"Yes," said Phebe. "I have played since I was thirteen years old."

Miss McGrath looked at her watch.

"I have a pupil now. I'll meet you at the chapel at three o'clock, and we'll see what you can do."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Phebe. "Thank you."

Phebe went to the library to read. She heard in anticipation the soft tones whispering to her ear and the louder tones rolling through the building. She was happy playing to herself, but she was happier and played better when she had an audience, even an invisible audience. She looked at the illustrations in a magazine, then out at the rain, now driven in sheets by the wind, and longest of all at the creeping clock. Ten minutes before the appointed time she found Miss McGrath in the chapel. Pleased with the prospect of being relieved of the task she disliked, she questioned Phebe about her training.

"How much of the mechanism do you understand?"

Phebe's hands trembled.

"Here is where you turn it on. At home we had a boy to pump. He was all right when he was awake. Then the pedals I understand. These are more convenient than ours. Here are the swell and the crescendo. I don't know these stops, but I can soon try them. These banks of keys I know, but not this."

Miss McGrath turned on the current.

"There's the hymn-book — suppose you play a hymn."

Ignoring the book Phebe pulled out half a dozen stops to her left and half a dozen to her right and played a tune from memory, announcing it on the swell, inventing simple variations, and then thundering it out on the great. Upon Miss McGrath she made a curious impression. She stated problems and solved them intelligently and executed difficult passages admirably, but her playing seemed to be an exercise of her mind and her muscles and not an expression of her heart. Nevertheless Miss McGrath was astonished.

"Where did you learn 'Sleepers wake, the night is flying'?"

"That we sing in church," said Phebe, taking pride in a fact which she had not known was anything to be proud of. "In Millerstown, near Allentown."

Miss McGrath retired to a seat at the back of the chapel, and Phebe tried new combinations, venturing daringly with her simpler preludes and postludes.

"Is that the sort of composition you like?" asked Miss McGrath, coming down the aisle.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Would you be willing to play in chapel?"

Phebe did not understand. "Like this on Saturdays?"

"I mean for the exercises in the morning — a prelude and a postlude and a hymn."

"*Me!*" said Phebe.

Miss McGrath looked at her humorously.

"You've heard my performance!"

Phebe gasped, "I'd like it!"

"I'll speak to Dr. Todd. Suppose you go to my room and wait for me."

At Miss McGrath's entrance, Joseph sprang to his feet, as he sprang for few persons. She tapped at the inner door and was bidden to enter. Todd let some of his teachers stand while he sat, but he never sat while Miss McGrath stood.

"Dr. Todd, this afternoon a student by the name of Phebe Stannard came to my room and asked to be allowed to play the organ. She plays well — far better than I do, and I suggest that she be invited to play regularly. I shall then be free to lead the singing."

Todd shook his head. "It will add to the expense of the music department which is already disproportionately high."

"Not at all. She should have some remuneration, but it needn't be in money. I can give her some instruction in the history of music and in theory."

"She can't spare the time."

"If she neglects her other work, she can stop."

"We can try it," consented Todd, wondering whether his hair was smooth.

Miss McGrath's hand was on the door. She offered no encouragement to vanity.

"I should like to take her to the city with me sometimes to concerts. She's doing me a very great favor."

"We shall consider that when the time comes."

Miss McGrath found Phebe watching for her return.

"It's all right," she said. "You may begin at prayer-meeting to-morrow evening." Suddenly she pointed to the window. "It's clearing!"

The rain had ceased, the gray clouds were parting, and in the west there was a band of pale gold. The window frame began to shake. Miss McGrath looked earnestly at Phebe and felt a hope of pleasure in the companionship of this new acquaintance.

"There's the west wind," she said. "If you haven't anything else to do, get your hat and coat and come to walk."

Phebe allowed herself a moment of rapt meditation before she rejoined Miss McGrath. She was grateful to her, but she was more grateful to Todd from whose higher authority came this gracious favor. He would not be at the prayer-meeting, but he would be at chapel on Monday, and then she would play for him. She would play also for forty teachers and six hundred students, but they were negligible.

III

FROM the window of Beulah's and Phebe's room in Millerstown the mountains showed their clearest, most tender blue. It was ten o'clock on Christmas morning and the bright frost had not yet melted. Beulah stood by the window, her arm round Phebe. Though Phebe had been at home for three days, Beulah had not let her out of her sight.

"Do you think Mom looks worse?" she asked suddenly.

"No, I don't," answered Phebe. "I think she looks better."

Beulah knew that her mother looked no better, but if she looked no worse, that was heavenly consolation.

"But you are thinner," said Phebe.

"That's good," laughed Beulah. She had something important to tell and she began with a blushing "Phebe, —" but when there was a knock at the door she flew down as though she had been offered a way of escape from serious peril.

Phebe looked at the house next door and blushed. She had admired Hilarius Hersh, who had not an idea in his head! How her taste had improved! Todd had complimented her on her progress and on her playing and had wished her a Merry Christmas, and the honor sent her walking to the station with her head in air, impelled her to sit alone so that she might dream without interruption, filled her with affection toward every one in Millerstown except Hersh and Elma, and at the same time lifted her far above all Millerstonians.

She looked toward the furnace and thought vaguely of Alexander Crusen, she looked toward the mountain and thought of pious Ambrose and his unsavory origin. She saw herself dressed in her pink dress pacing up and down like a mad woman. Suppose that Ambrose had seen her! She wished to appear well even in his lowly eyes, and she was uneasy at the thought of meeting him at the Christmas enter-

tainment in the very place where, though she looked down upon him, she had made use of him in order to spare Hilarius.

In the kitchen she was allowed to do nothing; in the sitting-room, which was transformed into a dining-room, the table was already set. Aunt Cassie sat in the parlor. She would soon be confined to bed, and she had not decided whether it would be more convenient to Beulah to have her upstairs or down, but she inclined to the former, believing that physical weariness would be easier to endure than the constant consciousness of her presence. Now she looked Phebe over from head to foot. She had seen her beautiful body grow; she knew how shapely and well-knit and supple she was. Beulah was differently made; she would early settle into stoutness; but Phebe would remain light and alert.

"Tell me about your school, Phebe."

Phebe related everything — and nothing. She told about the difficulty she had had with her studies, a difficulty in which Cassie was loath to believe, but she said nothing about her depression. She told about her roommates, but said nothing about her hatred for Wilhelmina's prayer-meetings. She told about the kindness of the principal, but said nothing about his beautiful hands or his handsome figure. She told about Miss McGrath's relief, when she had showed her that she could play — "I bet you could!" said Aunt Cassie — but she did not say that she played well because Todd stood near the organ bench.

Beulah opened the oven to baste her turkey and the savory odor filled the house, and Phebe went to the kitchen to assist in serving the dinner. In the sitting-room she glanced at the table and straightened a fork. She was tempted to tell Beulah that in the great world pie was eaten with a fork alone, but she changed her mind. She had ceased to be one of them and their habits were unimportant.

The delicious dinner eaten and the dishes washed, Phebe and Beulah went to make calls. Beulah was the older by only a month, but she looked five years older. Her taste was subdued; she wore long dresses and chose dark colors. Her hat was a woman's hat, and she wore her furpiece as though she were Sarah Ann Mohr. Phebe had a similar furpiece, but she fastened it under her ear so that it looked like a scarf instead of a fichu. Her coat and hat were blue. She could wear all colors, but Millerstown liked her best in red.

Their arms linked together, they proceeded down Main Street, smiling back at faces at windows, answering every waving hand, and turning in at many doors. Phebe was happy, and, as the afternoon wore on, elated. The object of their many calls was not so much to see the householders as the Christmas *putz*, landscapes laboriously constructed of fir twigs and moss and little mirrors to simulate streams, and set with barns and houses and mills. Electric lighting had been introduced into the village and a few happy boys had electric trains. Every one affected a humorous surprise at seeing Phebe.

"Well!" cried Susannah Kuhns. "I said to Pop, 'I guess Phebe feels herself too grand for us now that she is at Normal School,' and Pop, he said, '*Ach!*' he said, 'don't talk so dumb! When Phebe feels herself too grand for me, then I'm too grand for her.' And now here you are! You are taller!'

"I'm glad of that," said Phebe.

"And you talk so grand."

"*Ach*, well!" said Phebe broadly. "I guess I can talk, too, in the old fashion if I want. At school they don't understand anything but English. They don't know what *Schnitz ŭnd Knöpf* is, nor yet *Rivvel Kŭche, ŭnd*" — she realized that she could please even more, "*ŭnd sie hen nie vom Dŭnke' gehört, ŭnd sie esse ken Latwerg ŭnd Schmierkäs' Brodt.*"

The Kuhnses shrieked.

"*Grigst dŭ genŭg zu esse?*" asked an anxious voice. "Do you really get enough to eat in such a place, Phebe?"

"*Ach,* yes," answered Phebe. "*Mir kenne die deficiencies ŭfmache mit pretzels.*"

"Aren't you afraid you'll spoil your English?"

"No," said Phebe, "I'll practice on the train going back."

They called upon the clockmaker and jeered at him about his little wheels, and he shouted with laughter.

"When you're outgrown, Phebe, and educated, then I'll tell the people how dumb you once were."

Everywhere were the same warm bright interiors, the same lingering odors of feasting. No one in Millerstown was hungry, and no one was cold. Even Mrs. Kauffman had hung a wreath in her window, and in the three-roomed house of rheumatic Vinnie Most there was a tree.

To Neuweilers' Beulah declined to go, offering supper as an excuse. She grew red, then pale, when Phebe suggested a call, but Phebe suspected nothing; her eyes were not sharpened by maternal affection like Cassie's. Twilight was falling, and she seized Beulah's hand and made her run. Beulah was right; they must have supper over and be at the entertainment promptly. Beulah had succeeded her as organist, and she had promised that she would substitute for her.

She did not remember until she went up the pike in the moonlight that if she played she would sit near Hersh and Elma. But Millerstown did not suspect her infatuation. Except for one occasion, Beulah had always been with them — how thankful she was for Beulah's intrusions! On that occasion no one could have seen her but Ambrose, and even his observation was unlikely. But she could not quite persuade away her uneasiness. She reminded herself with unreasonable spite that Ambrose was the son of miserable

George, the housemate of bestial Ilka. Sometimes he did not have his hair cut for months, and it stood out round his head like a bush. Sometimes he had it shaved close, and then he looked like a picked chicken. Last summer he had brought a gift of flowers to Aunt Cassie and she had invited him to supper — Phebe remembered every frightened motion of his awkward hands. Why think of him for an instant? Suppose he did look reproachful — his opinion was of no importance. If he said anything against her, who would believe him? She called herself to account quickly — there was nothing to be said against her.

She thought of him no more after she entered the pine-scented church and the pleasant little murmur followed her up the aisle. She arranged her music and awaited the signal of Beulah, busy in the chapel with the excited children. She saw Willie Kuhns and smiled at him — Willie would have a busy evening. When in response to Beulah's lifted finger she began a festival march there were smiles and nods of satisfaction all over the church. She was again the center of the world.

After the entertainment she and Beulah went down the familiar path. Cassie had gone to bed, and, leaning their folded arms on the footboard, they gave an account of the evening.

"They knew their pieces fine," said Beulah. "And the music was fine. My, the people looked when they heard Phebe!"

"It has been a nice day," said Cassie, looking first at one, then at the other.

"Yes," agreed Phebe heartily. "Fine."

Beulah lingered with her mother, and Phebe, undressing slowly, heard her laugh. Presently she came into the room panting and closed the door with a slam.

"What's after you?" asked Phebe.

"Nothing," said Beulah. She undressed and lay down.

"Beulah," said Phebe, "what has become of Ambrose Weidner?"

"Ambrose Weidner?" repeated Beulah as though she did not for the instant remember who Ambrose was. At this moment she would have answered in the same preoccupied tone if Phebe had asked her about her mother. "Oh, he's gone away from Millerstown." She took suddenly a deep inhalation. "Phebe, I have something to tell you."

Phebe turned with a quick motion. Not surely that Ambrose had seen her wandering on the mountain with Hersh or waiting for him in despair! Surely Beulah could not know about Dr. Todd!

"What is it?"

"I'm going to be married," said Beulah almost in a whisper.

"Married!" cried Phebe.

"Yes, married," laughed Beulah.

"To whom?" gasped Phebe.

"To William Neuweiler."

"Well, I declare!" Phebe saw substantial, blue-eyed William. "What a goose I've been!" She took Beulah's hand. "Well, Beulah!" she laughed. "I believe I'm more excited than you. What have you on your finger?"

"A ring."

"Not a diamond!" said Phebe, feeling it.

"Yes."

"When did you get it?"

"This evening."

"Why didn't he come along home? That's no way to act — to let your girl come alone!"

"I wasn't alone," said Beulah happily. "I told him I wanted to walk with you for old times' sake."

Long after Beulah was asleep, Phebe lay awake, her hands clasped under her unpillowed head. Beulah to be married! Beulah, who had had so little experience of life! But to Phebe there was only one human being to whom experience of any sort was vital, and that was Phebe Stannard. The announcement roused no envy; it merely quickened her ambition to do well. She had now spent four idle days; she would have seven more, then she would be back at her work.

IV

The first chirp of birds wakened Phebe and Beulah and Heimbach and his wife. It was August, and in August the first chirp still comes early. But no one thought of turning over for another nap. Phebe and Beulah sprang out, one on each side of their broad bed and Heimbach sprang at once from his. Little Aunt Rosie, who had come to stay permanently, sprang from hers. She was a tiny, shy woman who spoke only Pennsylvania German.

Aunt Cassie merely moved her head on the pillow. On this, the day of Beulah's wedding, she would attempt for the last time the painful, exhausting process of going downstairs. Her own rising was still hours away; the wedding was to be at eleven o'clock, and she was to rest until all the work was done.

William Neuweiler, asleep in his father's fine house, was also awakened by the chirping of birds. When he saw that it was still dark, he went back to bed, but he could not sleep and he rose again. When he was ten years old, he had determined to marry Beulah Heimbach, and he was now twenty-one. He had a surprise for her, and he sat down at the window to watch the dawn and to think about it. He planned the whole day with the utmost care for details. As soon as it was fully light, he would dress and then he would pack his

suitcase. He thought with pleasure of his new clothes. He did not think much about Beulah, having realized that thoughts of Beulah did not promote a sane consideration of practical affairs. He wished that the ceremony was over, but he reminded himself that it was an ordeal through which many men duller and less courageous than he had passed successfully.

Daylight faded out the light of the lamp on the Heimbachs' breakfast table. Beulah was pale, and she deferred to Phebe in everything, and Aunt Rosie also looked to Phebe, who accepted with composure the position assigned her. She was, she was well aware, an efficient person. The work of her first school year had been declared by Todd to be the finest accomplished by any student during his incumbency. He had made this declaration to other young ladies, but of this Phebe was in happy ignorance. She had played for the Commencement exercises, a task hitherto performed by an expert organist from the town. She had been Miss McGrath's companion in a dozen expeditions to Philadelphia, and had learned how to behave when Miss McGrath's friends included her in their invitations to lunch or dinner. Miss McGrath was certain that somewhere in this fine young creature there was a heart, but its beating was inaudible to her. She did not suspect that along with gratitude Phebe felt a terrified distaste for the incomplete and wasted life of her benefactress.

Phebe's alacrity, her eagerness, her good humor, had their source in affection and gratitude, but all were quickened by a forward look to her plans for the evening when the wedding should be over, the guests gone home, Beulah started upon her wedding trip, the house in order, and herself free. Several times during the busy day she took a tablet from her bureau drawer and wrote a few words upon it. When she did so, her brows knitted, but her eyes glowed.

She rose from her place at the table and stood with her hand on the back of her chair.

"Now, Aunt Rosie can get the kitchen in order and Beulah the front of the house while I make the beds and lay out Beulah's clothes. Then Aunt and Beulah can start the dinner and I will put the flowers in the vases. Then Beulah and I will help Aunt Cassie, and then Beulah can be free."

Her assistants moved each to her appointed task.

"And I?" asked Heimbach in a tone which was at once frightened and amused.

"You, Uncle, can fetch coal and you can sweep out front."

"I will," promised Uncle.

Phebe ran up the stairs. She had forgotten to lay back the covers of the bed, and now she tore them off and shook sheets and blankets out the window. A flock of robins, already gathering for the southward flight, sped from the top of the grape arbor with a terrified whirr of wings. She shook till the sheets sounded like taut sails snapping in the wind, and she spread them out with a loving hand and put on a fresh coverlet, and pillow-cases with fluted ruffles. Then she lifted a new suitcase from the floor of the cupboard and opened it on a chair. She had learned from Miss McGrath the use of neat cases for blouses and underclothes and shoes, and she had made a set for Beulah marked with her initials. She had helped to make all Beulah's clothes. Those which Beulah was to take with her for her brief journey, she folded with exquisite care and placed in the suitcase. Then she laid out on the bed Beulah's new white dress and her embroidered underclothes and white stockings and slippers, and fastened the breastpin which was her gift to Beulah into the front of the dress. Stannard's run of luck had continued longer than usual and she had ample funds.

Having finished the packing, she walked to the bureau,

took out her tablet and wrote down the word "jewel." As she laid it back, Beulah came up the stairs, her mother's breakfast tray in her hands. She paused and spoke a laughing word over her shoulder.

"Listen next door, Phebe."

Phebe listened.

"Whose car is it?" demanded Elma shrilly in the opposite bedroom. "Who bought it? Who paid for it?"

"It may be your car, but you can't run it," came a louder answer. Hilarius usually spoke gently, but Hilarius as worm had turned. He had even simplified his vocabulary. "You'll kill yourself and me. When I run the car, then I go with you, and only then."

"I know well enough why you married me," declared Elma.

In a terrific voice Hilarius uttered a brilliant retort.

"Do you?" said he. "Then you know more than I."

Mrs. Heimbach was helped downstairs, her courage indomitable and the patience of her helpers inexhaustible. Throned by the parlor window, she leaned back her head and looked at Phebe.

"Did Beulah go upstairs?"

"She went for your little shawl, Aunty."

"You won't have to do this again, Phebe. This is the last time."

A pleasant air blew through the pleasant house, swaying the white curtains, wafting back and forth the odors of baking and the odors of flowers. Beulah went upstairs and Phebe stirred about like a spoon or stick moved by some tremendous, energetic hand.

At half-past ten the Neuweilers arrived, father and mother and son. The father was William grown middle-aged, but lacking William's blue eyes which he had from his mother. Neuweiler was silent like Heimbach; his voluntary contri-

butions to the conversation were few. He addressed one to Phebe, now appareled in white.

"Does she make you dance in the pig trough?" he asked, alluding to a custom lost in antiquity.

Phebe laughed.

"Pretty near, but she's a month older."

For ten minutes Neuweiler smiled at his wit.

"Cheer up!" whispered Phebe to William as she passed. He looked at her from an agony of discomfort — if only these dragging moments were past and he and Beulah were away! The presence of his father and mother embarrassed him, and the sight of Cassie's fortitude made his heart ache.

"Do you want to help?" asked Phebe.

William rose with alacrity.

"Why, Phebe!" said Aunt Cassie.

"I won't give him anything that will spoil his fine clothes," promised Phebe. "You can put the chairs up to the table, and then you can bring the ice-cream freezer from the cellar. But be careful!"

William glanced at the ceiling as though to pierce it and assure himself of the reality of his beloved.

"She'll be down when it's time," laughed Phebe. "She won't run away, William. She's willing."

William blushed and laughed and his paralysis was cured. As he finished his tasks, Mr. Weygandt arrived and they conferred together in the hall. The bubbling pots on the stove were pushed back; Phebe ran up the back stairs as Heimbach came down the front. Aunt Rosie washed her hands and advanced to the parlor. Phebe found Beulah standing in the center of the bedroom, pale and trembling.

"I didn't dare to sit down for fear of mussing my skirt."

Phebe glanced into the mirror and powdered her nose — she had learned this pernicious habit at school.

"That was right. He told me he wouldn't take you with a mussed skirt. Now are you all ready, you old peach?"

"Oh, Phebe!" said Beulah piteously. "We have been so happy."

"We're going to be happier." Phebe pinched both Beulah's cheeks, then kissed them. "Come on, now, Sister Heimbach, and get married, and don't think you're rid of me."

"Rid of you! Oh, Phebe!"

"Come on!" commanded Phebe. "He may run away."

Arm in arm the two went down the narrow stairs, pressed close together as they had always pressed. At the foot waited William, looking upward, and his gaze sent a flood of color into Beulah's pale, dark cheeks.

"You look beautiful," whispered Phebe as she let her go.

Phebe stood in the doorway, erect, attentive, acting her part. Beulah looked and was darling, but, oh, how much better to be Phebe Stannard! She heard Mr. Weygandt's kind voice and the clear responses; she saw Heimbach's wet eyes and trembling beard and Aunt Cassie's steady gaze. The Neuweilers bent their heads in slow, unconscious expressions of approval.

When Beulah went to kiss her mother, Cassie's eyes were returning from a look at the figure in the doorway. Beulah was safe, but what of Phebe? She was only a little less dear and she was no home-keeping bird like Beulah. Her wings had already carried her away — how far would she fly?

When the dinner was served and eaten, Neuweiler rose and passed a paper to Beulah.

"You will live here — I understand that," he said. "But that is your wedding present."

"A house!" cried Beulah. "I thought people got towels, and napkins, and spoons!"

"Some do," said Neuweiler. "When they can't get better things."

"And my present is out front," announced William.

"Out front?" repeated Beulah, dazed. What could there be out front?

"Come and see," said Cassie from her throne.

Beulah saw a shining object before the curb. But it had no relation to her!

"I don't see anything!"

"Why, Beulah!" said Cassie. "Are you blind?"

"That!" cried Beulah.

Neuweiler slapped his thigh. Mother Neuweiler nodded her head like a mechanical toy.

Beulah appealed to her own family. "They are teasing me!"

"No," said Cassie. "We knew about it."

"It's for your wedding trip," explained Father Neuweiler.

"Beulah is to learn to run it," announced William. "Then she needn't wait always for me when she wants to go riding." The announcement was epochal in Millerstown.

Aunt Rosie cleared the table, Beulah and Phebe went upstairs, Mother Neuweiler sat with Aunt Cassie in the parlor, the men sat on the front porch smoking. A voice shouted, "All over?" and a man passing on the other side conveyed his congratulations by shaking hands with himself. Another ran across — this was the man from the garage, who opened the top of the engine and peered in.

"You've got a tiptop car, William, and you won't regret it. I'll exchange it when you need more room. Hope you'll need a seven-passenger."

The older men laughed and William blushed. The car had been stored at a garage in Allentown and he had run it mile after mile. He knew it and loved it — if he were only riding away in it!

At one o'clock Beulah came downstairs. They were going to Harrisburg and Gettysburg and Baltimore and Washington and Philadelphia. Neither had ever been far from home; they knew nothing of cities or of hotels, and after all only a very little of each other, but they sailed away without a misgiving, William with his steadfast eyes upon the road, Beulah waving her hand and looking back as long as she could see.

Phebe and Aunt Rosie helped Cassie upstairs. All her powers of mind and body were required for this final heroic journey. When she was in bed, she closed her eyes.

"I'll sit here," offered Aunt Rosie. "I can watch her, Phebe, if you want to walk out."

To walk out was exactly what Phebe had promised herself. She inspected the lower floor — all was in order as if no wedding had ever been. She stood for a moment on the steps; then she went toward the church. Crusen sat on the hotel porch, but Crusen was nothing to her. She passed the mountain road and laughed a little shamefaced laugh, and entered the churchyard gate. She carried in her hand her tablet and pencil.

On the church step she established herself, looking down upon tree-shaded Millerstown and out over the western plain. It was a position in which a great picture might be conceived or a great poem composed, and it was to compose a poem that Phebe had come. Like all great works, the poem had long been simmering in her mind, and filled with the rapture of creation she wrote.

What need have I of token, love, of thine,
Of jeweled circlet, or of violets rare,
When ever warm against this throat of mine,
I feel thy kiss? Why should I care

For roses, dew-bathed though they be,
When on my face I feel love's rose-hued flame,
When in my heart is only place for thee,
When on my lips still throbs thy name?

Having finished, she folded her hands and sat filled with bliss. In three weeks she would see Dr. Todd. Her imagination had shaped a variety of greetings; in one he laid his hand on her shoulder — though the anticipation of this caress was based upon no past liberty; in another, they simply looked at each other, he and she, and understood. She did not think of Mrs. Todd; Mrs. Todd was as unregarded by her as the laws of gravitation by Darius Green. Mrs. Todd did not exist.

V

PHEBE stood in the upper hallway of her Uncle Heimbach's house. Before her on the old-fashioned bureau were piles of sheets and pillow-cases, and these she was arranging in the drawers. The house was quiet and the corners of the rooms were growing dim. Occasionally the noise of a passing wagon or automobile rose from the street, or the soft murmuring voices of Uncle Heimbach and Beulah and William and Aunt Rosie from the rear porch.

There was no one in the house but Phebe. Cassie was gone from her room, and it was as though she had taken the paraphernalia of her suffering with her. Even the paper on her wall had been renewed; and the scrubbed floor awaited a new carpet and the bed a new mattress.

"If you could only stay and help them fix up!" she had gasped in her last conscious hour.

"I can," said Phebe. "The examinations are over; I would have nothing to do if I were at school."

"Then burn everything!" counseled Aunt Cassie. "Everything. Quickly."

"I will," promised Phebe.

Her senior year was over, all but the Commencement exercises for which she was to return to Leesburg to-morrow. Examinations proved her proficient, according to an extraordinary document which she would receive at Commencement, in Orthography, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography, English Grammar, History of the United States, Physiology, Psychology, History of Education, English Literature, Rhetoric, General History, Latin, Plane Geometry, Natural Philosophy, Botany, Algebra, Civil Government, Drawing, Bookkeeping, Vocal Music, Theory of Teaching, and Solid Geometry, and authorized her to teach any of these branches in the schools of the Commonwealth "without further examination therein whatever."

She was also entitled to enter the sophomore class at Granger College. These bare facts had been made known to her in the few moments between the receipt of Uncle Heimbach's telegram and her hurried departure. She had not yet received Dr. Todd's grateful benison — that joyful experience awaited her return. There would be ample time for him to say all that he had to say. She did not wish to spend two months in idleness and, though Stannard's luck still held, she had promised to remain at Leesburg during the summer to assist the librarian, Miss Crane, in recataloguing the books. Besides, the Heimbach house, which was not large, was to have before long another inmate who had more right there than she.

She looked forward to the summer as to a romantic adventure. She would be her own mistress in a place where she had lived under rigid discipline. She might burn her light till midnight if she wished; she would be able to play the organ whenever she liked. Most wonderful and most desirable of all, she would be frequently in the company of Todd. Stand-

ing at the old bureau, laying the sheets in the deep drawers and smoothing them out, she thought of him and her heart throbbed as though the stream of her blood grew thick and forced its way with difficulty through narrow valves. Once during the past year he had laid his hand on her shoulder, not in a dream, but in reality, and it seemed to lie there at this instant.

When she had finished her task, she went into Aunt Cassie's room and sat by the window. The tears returned readily to her swollen eyes. It seemed as though Aunt Cassie had been gone for a long time; it was hard to remember exactly how she had looked. To Phebe this vagueness of recollection was disloyal. She would sit here and think her back; then she would pack her bag and say good-night and go to bed.

The rocking-chair was deep and comfortable, and she laid back her head and folded her hands. Between the slats of the bowed shutters she could look across under the high-trimmed branches of the trees to the porch of the hotel. She tried to fix her thoughts on Aunt Cassie, but almost every one else whom she knew passed through her mind and out as though all belonged to a procession — Mr. Weygandt with his white hair and his tremulous voice; huge, gentle Sarah Ann; twisted Vinnie Most; Miss McGrath; the rude office boy and a hundred Leesburg students. She remembered the questions on her examination papers, the empty chapel and the sound of the organ. She had been away from the organ now for a week. One hand tapped out a difficult fingering on the other.

On the hotel porch sat Alexander Crusen pipe in hand, reading a book. Crusen was a great reader — the fact recommended him to her. But her thoughts returned promptly to Todd; she pictured herself back at school in the empty building with its echoing spaces. She saw herself alone in the

library. It was twilight, and the alcoves were dim. She heard a step, felt a human being close to her, turned, and imagined an arm round her pressing her closely as Beulah's arm pressed her.

"Phebe!" said a low voice.

Alas! it was the approach of Uncle Heimbach which had suggested this heavenly vision. She sprang up and went into the hall.

"Yes, Uncle."

Uncle walked past her blindly and entered the room and closed the door. She heard strangled sobs and remembered Cassie with remorse. Having finished her packing, she went down to the porch and sat on the arm of Beulah's chair. Beulah laid her head against her shoulder and felt for her hand.

"When will you come back?" she asked.

"In September for two weeks," answered Phebe. Each would have said more, or thought she would have said more, if William and Aunt Rosie had not been there. "You'll write to me?"

"Every two weeks," promised Beulah solemnly. "Like always."

"The bed linen is put away and everything is in order."

"Yes," said Beulah. She had no thanks for Phebe — one did not thank one's sister for helping to wait upon a mother. Phebe bent and kissed her. "There, Sister Neuweiler," she said. "Good-night."

In the morning Phebe walked up and down the station platform with William. Heimbach had been for two hours in his shop, and the hours had passed more swiftly than any hours for weeks. Beulah sat sewing in the cool kitchen in the same spot in which she had sat when she and Phebe made their dresses together. She was sewing now on tiny garments,

and she smiled a pale little smile as cheerfulness ebbed back. It was pleasant to sit here and listen to the robins and look out at the green light under the grape arbor, and hear Aunt Rosie moving about, and to know that her mother's pain was stilled.

Phebe wore a dark blue suit and a little dark green caplike turban which had been selected for her by Miss McGrath. The bright sunshine brought out the beautiful iridescence on the breast of the bird which encircled it. She talked to William about Beulah, and nodded to the half-dozen persons on the platform, and looked up the gleaming track for the train. When Crusen came up on the platform, she held her shoulders straighter; though she felt no interest in him, she wished to impress him; his admiration would be subtly and indirectly an offering to Todd. He smiled and lifted his hat, and she realized that she had invited a greeting by her stare. He walked past her and went into the station.

"That's a smart fellow," said William.

"Is he?" Two years ago Phebe would have been abashed by Crusen's superiority; now she was abashed by no one.

"The train's coming," announced William. "Don't get too close."

"I won't," promised Phebe. "Now make Beulah write to me."

"She won't need urging. Step up and I'll hand up your satchel."

A quiet voice said, "Let me have it," and William found the suitcase taken from his hand.

"Thank you," he said to Crusen. "Good-bye, Phebe."

"Good-bye," said Phebe, confused by the rapid succession of events. "Thank you."

William went home before he went to the store.

"Well, I got her off safe," he said to Beulah. "She has

her ticket clear through and everything; she oughtn't to have any trouble."

"She won't," declared Beulah proudly. "Not Phebe!"

"The superintendent carried her satchel. He was very polite."

"Mr. Crusen?" said Beulah, astonished.

"Yes. Don't you like him?"

"N-no," said Beulah as though she were considering. "He's too English and too high up."

"Phebe's half English and you like her."

"But she's different."

"Well, I guess he won't hurt her just lifting in her satchel," said William practically.

"No," agreed Beulah. "I guess not."

But when Beulah told Uncle Heimbach, his face grew pale, then red.

"The superintendent!" he repeated.

"Yes, Pop — Mr. Crusen," said Beulah. "Nobody is too grand for our Phebe. That's a queer name — Crusen."

"Did he go off with her?"

Startled by his tone, Beulah turned and looked at him. His beard quivered, his eyes blazed.

"Only on the same train, Pop! Why, he's nothing to Phebe." Her own uneasiness seemed absurd when she saw it thus exaggerated. "Do you know anything against him?"

"I don't like any of these outlanders, especially English ones," Heimbach burst out furiously. "They bring trouble, that's what they bring. He can leave his hands off our Phebe!"

It seemed as though Heimbach would say more, but, remembering that Beulah was not well, he held his tongue. He glanced piteously toward the sitting-room, then toward the stairway, as though he sought a confidant, and finally applied himself to dinner.

Beulah looked at him anxiously; then her cheeks suffused and her eyes widened. Fragments of interrupted conversations between her father and mother came back to her, and in her breast was quickened a suspicion which had been banished as an impossibility. There had been some irregularity, some confusion and sorrow about her aunt's marriage.

"Oh, poor Phebe!" said Beulah.

VI

Crusen's were eyes which took in many things at a glance. He saw Phebe's straight figure, her rosy cheeks, her well-fitting blue suit, and her green turban, and decided that she was attractive. He noted also that her suitcase was made of *papier maché* and that a colored flag was pasted from corner to corner, on which the name Leesburg was printed in orange and black. Leesburg, he supposed, was the school to which she was returning after her aunt's funeral.

He was amused when he found himself preceding Phebe down the aisle, the hideous suitcase in his hand. He would find her a seat and then fly. He had observed groups of students, boys and girls, each carrying an object of this kind, meeting noisily on trains and in railroad stations, and he would as soon have been seen escorting a primary school to the Zoo as to be caught in such company. Then he remembered that Phebe was not returning after a vacation, and would consequently meet no objectionable companions and he asked whether he might sit beside her.

"I guess so," said Phebe. She moved close to the window and pulled her skirt aside to give him room.

"You're going back to school?"

"Yes," said Phebe. Her week in Millerstown had broadened her speech. "I have only Commencement any more; then I will be through."

"What are you going to do then?"

"I'm going to work in the library in the summer and in September I'm going to college."

"There's no other Millerstown girl in college, is there?"

"No, sir."

"Your name isn't Heimbach, is it?"

"It's Stannard."

"That's an English name."

"My father is English. He was superintendent at the furnace."

"Of course!" said Crusen. "I didn't realize you were his daughter. Where is he now?"

"In Helena, Montana."

Crusen turned a little in the seat and looked at her.

"Your mother came from Millerstown?"

"Yes, her name was Heimbach."

"I see," said Crusen.

He pieced together bits of information about Stannard. Stannard had, he had heard, been caught, but apparently he was faithful to his obligations.

"What subjects are you interested in?" he asked.

"English literature and languages."

"You work hard?"

Phebe thrilled at the thought of Todd. Two hours more and she would see him!

"I work all the time," she boasted.

"Where are you going to college?" asked Crusen.

Phebe told him.

"Why don't you go to a larger school in a city, or near a city?" he asked. "Women's colleges are rather cloistered places, aren't they?"

Phebe looked at him uneasily. Cloistered! College!

"You'll probably become very learned and do post-graduate

work elsewhere," prophesied Crusen. "Perhaps you'll go abroad to study."

Phebe was thrilled and somewhat frightened.

"Have you been abroad?" she asked.

After long periods of silence necessitated by the lack of congenial companionship, Crusen liked to talk. He began to describe one of his journeys.

"Tell me about the ship to begin with," begged Phebe.

Crusen laughed and looked at his watch.

"It's half-past eight. In an hour we'll be in Reading and there I take a different train. If you start me off, I may talk all the time."

"Yes, well," said Phebe.

Crusen smiled — the Pennsylvania idiom might be charming. He turned still more so that he could watch her and went on in his low voice. He took her ticket from her hand and passed it to the conductor without interrupting his monologue. Her attention pleased but did not surprise him — women of more years and experience and charm heard him gladly.

Phebe's attention, however, was not wholly his. She listened intently and comprehended everything, but she did not forget Augustus Todd. It was nine o'clock; he would be in his office, and in a few hours she would open the door and enter. Once when Crusen's knee touched her she drew away. He was conscious of the withdrawal as he was of every motion of the women with whom he talked or walked or ate, and he was a little annoyed. He thought her young and green, not realizing that he was approaching the time of life when the appetite which has permitted itself an unwholesome variety of diet covets freshness.

Phebe expected him to leave as soon as the train drew into the Reading station, a queer overornamented building

surrounded by a complicated system of Y's, but he sat still, explaining that her train did not go on for fifteen minutes and his did not arrive for a half-hour.

"You've given me a very pleasant morning," he said smilingly.

"You've given me one," corrected Phebe. "When you get back to Millerstown, you can tell the folks that I'm this far on the right way."

"I'm sorry you're not going to be in Millerstown," said Crusen. "I've only told you about half of one journey."

"And think of all the time you sat on the hotel porch alone!" said Phebe.

Crusen laughed. "If I'd only been acquainted with you!"

He shook hands and went down the aisle. Phebe watched him step out into the hot sunshine, and blushed as he walked half the length of the car and lifted his hat. Her heart was throbbing — in two hours she would see Todd.

She observed beyond Crusen in the sunshine a tall figure, like and yet different from a figure with which she had somewhere been familiar. Her thoughts explored the Leesburg Normal School in vain. Suddenly she was back in the hot chapel in Millerstown playing and singing with all her strength. Before her was the great body of Sarah Ann, beside her Beulah, on the platform was Hilarius, in the corner was Ambrose Weidner. The tall figure was his. She had ceased to worry about his opinion, and she had heard that, aided by the church, he had gone to college. If so, he was probably returning to Millerstown for the summer. He looked less wild, his face was not so white, and his eyes were less enormous. It seemed to her that Crusen saw him also and went toward him, but before they met, her train started. It was not likely that they were acquainted. In another instant both were the unimportant figures of a dream.

VII

The June morning was perfect, the foliage was at its greenest, the lofty sky was unstained by clouds, the air was cool though motionless. In the great building only the faculty and the seniors remained. The seniors were preparing breathlessly for Commencement, donning white dresses or black suits which had been acquired for the most part by careful economy. Wilhelmina Herr was being robed like a priestess. She had by cunning accomplished her purpose and had checked off in her catalogue the name of every woman student. It was true that many of the interviews had been brief and unsatisfactory, but they had been achieved.

"The world is not necessarily to be converted," she explained to Mary Klinger, who had asked her impertinently how many souls she had won. "It's to be evangelized, preached to, and when I've obeyed that command I've done my duty. I've called your attention to the Word of God; the rest is your part."

In her little room Phebe sat waiting. She wore a white dress which she and Beulah had made at Christmas, and new white shoes and stockings. She had no close friend to see her graduate; even Miss McGrath was not here, music lessons having ceased before examinations began. She had given Phebe four handsome volumes of organ music as a Commencement present, but she felt no certainty of Phebe's affection; in fact she suspected that it would make no great difference to Phebe if they never met again.

Phebe sat like a bride awaiting the hour of her wedding. Fifteen minutes ago, Joseph had knocked at the door to say that Todd wished her to stop at the office at three o'clock in the afternoon. That would be her hour of joy; she waited entranced, seeing herself stand before him with the closed

door behind her. She imagined only one detail, her own words, spoken in a low tone, "I've done it because I wished to please you."

At quarter to ten she went to the chapel, walking with a stately air. The Professor of Mathematics, a tall overworked youth who could not speak without laughing nervously, was distributing programmes among the empty seats.

"Well!" said he. "Here is the sweet girl graduate!"

Phebe looked at him as at an equal.

"You'll be called to the office," she said sternly. "Students have been expelled for less, and teachers too."

The Professor of Mathematics stared; then he laughed a laugh which was not nervousness, but pure amusement. He found his pupils dull, and he had hitherto found Phebe dull with the rest. Perhaps the dullness was in the arduous lives they all led.

Phebe opened the organ and stepped up to the bench. A warning bell would be rung at ten minutes of ten and then she would begin to play. She opened her music, disposed her skirts so that she seemed to sit at the apex of a fluffy fan, and folded her hands. Todd would lead the procession, but she must not look at him, she must not even let her heart throb. When he and the Commencement speaker were in their places on the platform, and the students were ranged in five long rows across the front of the chapel, she would slip down and take her place among them and gaze her fill.

In a long address the speaker advocated banishing all cultural subjects from the curriculums of high schools and substituting vocational or professional subjects. When he concluded, Phebe led her classmates across the platform to receive diplomas from Todd's hand. She stood at the head of her class, but there were no honors, and this leading position was the only acknowledgment she received. Instead

of returning to her chair, she took her place on the organ bench, knowing that she, and not the speaker, was now the object of attention. She began the closing march with steady, deliberate fingers and played until the chapel was empty.

To the banquet of the alumni association in the flower-decked dining-room she came late and conspicuously. A place had been held for her at the chief table, and she approached it with her head high, winding her way among the crowded chairs. She was at the opposite end from Todd, but she was conscious of his every movement. She was to be at the office at three o'clock — let the Commencement speaker on one side of him continue his Commencement address, let the president of the Board of Trustees on the other talk business, let any one have him now — she, Phebe Stannard, had a rendezvous with him at three o'clock in his office.

At two o'clock the banquet was over; in a few minutes the dining-room was empty, and in their rooms the graduates were changing their clothes and making frantic efforts to catch trains. Through the halls expressmen pushed and dragged trunks and boxes. Open doors revealed stripped bureaus, empty cupboards, unmade beds.

Phebe slipped into the library as into a safe shelter. There Miss Crane sat behind her desk, stout, gray-haired, an island in a shifting sea. Commencement bored her, students bored her, the giving out of books bored her. She had one passion, the keeping of her library in order, and the removal of books disturbed that order. She spoke severely, enunciating distinctly and shaping her sentences carefully.

"You will begin with the English literature section at nine o'clock in the morning, Miss Stannard, dusting the books, transferring them to the room to the left, and preparing new cards. If you work intelligently, you will acquire an invaluable acquaintance with the material of classic European

and American literature, both creative and critical. I have planned your work with your instruction in view."

"Thank you," said Phebe.

She walked close to the shelves and looked up at the books which she was to handle, and the prospect of gaining systematic knowledge pleased her; brought up by Catherine Heimbach, she valued order as the first law of life. She had in her mind a clear though scant outline of English literature — how interesting to fill it out, to see all its fruits ranged in their proper places on its branches, to understand its laws of growth, the natural development of its main stem and its odd freaks.

But in another instant she gave her attention to the ticking of the clock, one, two, one, two — was it slackening its speed?

She went to a window and glanced down at the driveway. Todd was escorting the Commencement speaker to an automobile; she looked upon the top of his beautiful black head, holding her breath until he withdrew from her field of vision. Ten minutes of the hour had passed.

She left the library, went up to her room, and looked at herself in the ill-placed mirror. It seemed to her that she was pale, and she rubbed her cheeks. Then she smoothed her skirt — she would, of course, not change her dress until later. She dreamed her most delicious dream; she imagined herself standing before the shelves in the library. She heard a footstep, and did not turn her head. Her heart began to thump, and some one came up behind her and put an arm round her.

She looked at her watch — another ten minutes had passed. She ran down the steps and entered the chapel. The sun streamed in glaringly, the flowers were wilted. She played three soft measures, then she folded her arms and bent her

head. His arm would not be like Beulah's or Uncle Heimbach's or the arms of the men who had caught her and held her, laughing at her struggles and teasing her shamefully. At this old recollection she moved her body uneasily and jerked her head back sharply as though from a contaminating touch. She knew that even the recollection of the touch was contaminating, but she did not always resist quickly.

She began to play and succeeded in finishing another phrase; then she relapsed into dreaminess. After he had put his arm round her, he would say nothing for a long time. Her head bent lower, her cheeks grew rosier.

Suddenly panic seized her. She had no watch — suppose it was past three! She shut off the power without pushing in the stops and a long-drawn squeak accompanied her flying departure. She came panting to the library door and looked in. Only ten more minutes had passed.

She wandered slowly down the steps and out the door and across the lawn to a little grove, and sat on a bench. She watched a wagon drive away loaded with trunks; she saw luggage-laden students leaving bravely in couples in spite of rules; and wondered at their fondness for each other. They waited at a distant curb for a car; when it left, she knew that another ten minutes had passed.

She walked up and down the soft, clean lawn. The sun was still high, but the shadows had begun to creep over the grass. She heard a lark singing in the field across the road; she looked over half a mile of rolling country to a long stretch of woodland. She thought presently of the moon shining down upon the bench. She had never been out here in the moonlight — so strict was Leesburg discipline, but the summer was long and there would be many nights of moonlight.

It was safe, she decided, to wait for the first deliberate stroke of the clock; she could easily reach the office before the last reverberation died away. She would not speak to Miss Underhill; she would cross the floor and rap on the inner door. Miss Underhill might reprove her — she hoped that Miss Underhill would. She heard herself reply with dignity, "I have an appointment."

Before the first reverberation subsided, she was in the hall. When the clapper touched the bell for the third stroke, she was stepping through the outer office door. Miss Underhill was in her place, but she did not look up, and Phebe crossed the room and found the door of the inner office open. Todd was at his desk and he had but an instant ago closed the little drawer above his inkstand.

Disconcerted, Phebe rapped gently. The open door bred in her heart the first premonition of disaster.

"Come in, Miss Stannard."

"Miss Stannard!" He had several times called her "Phebe." She laid her hand on the door — he meant her, of course, to close it.

"Leave it open," he said in the kindliest way. "It's warm in here on sunny afternoons."

She stood beside his desk — surely he would ask her to be seated!

"You've done good work, Miss Stannard," he said pleasantly. "I wished to thank you before I went away."

Before he "went away" — the words were not clearly grasped by Phebe, but they sharpened her sense of impending woe.

"I've picked out several young women in the new senior class — Miss Hantz, Miss Woomer, and Miss Hulick, and told them that what you did they could do also. I'm going to Europe to-morrow with Mrs. Todd."

He rose from his handsome chair. His office furnishings were the only handsome objects in the building, as his salary was the only living wage. Thinking that he was going to close the door and say good-bye in privacy, Phebe choked back the sob which rose in her throat. But when he put out his hand, it was not toward the door.

"Good-bye," said he. "I hope you'll enjoy your work this summer and that you'll succeed in college. We're always glad to consider applications from former students for positions. Perhaps sometime you will come back."

Phebe gave him a cold hand. Many months afterwards, it suddenly occurred to her shamed recollection that he had by means of it turned her round as one might turn an image upon a revolving pedestal, but now, conscious only of Miss Underhill's puffs of hair and her shining eye-glasses, and nothing else, she stepped out from the office to the hall as though she were descending a long distance and the floor rose and smote the sole of her foot. She approached the stairway with a stiff gait and, clinging to the banister, began to climb the three long flights.

She came at last to her little room, and, reaching her straight, uncomfortable chair, sat shivering. A single blow is one thing, a second blow another. She was two years older than when she lay on the floor in Millerstown sobbing out her heart, and all her faculties had quickened — sensitiveness, tenderness, affection, passion. Her clasped hands looked blue, and she lifted them up and pressed them to her breast as though she pressed her own wounded soul. She was nothing to him but one of hundreds of students!

Suddenly she leaned forward, facing an appalling prospect. In this empty, hateful place she was to spend two months, moving books from shelf to shelf!

PART III

PART III

I

GRANGER COLLEGE was situated on steeply rising ground far above the small town of Granger and the Delaware River. It was nearer New York than Philadelphia, but Philadelphia was more easily accessible by rail, and the Dean, Miss Preston, was satisfied that it should be so. When she thought of New York, she saw garish electric signs, the gleaming eyes of painted women, and billboards announcing immoral plays; when she thought of Philadelphia, she remembered the Quaker meeting which she had attended with her grandmother in her childhood.

The college consisted of an enormous Main Building in which three hundred students were housed, fed, and instructed, a gymnasium, and several small residences. There was an excellent library, but otherwise the equipment was old-fashioned and poor. There was nothing poor, however, about Granger's situation or its prospect. The Main Building faced the west, and at the front door one seemed to be in a castle in the air. From the second floor the fertile plain was visible far beneath the cliff. A winding drive made an easy descent, and there were also several romantic footpaths by which a vigorous person could reach the village in fifteen minutes and could return in about forty-five.

Granger desired and attracted quiet girls of middle-class families who wished to be useful in the world; it discouraged elaborate dressing and looked askance upon extravagance.

The students, entering from High Schools and not from expensive preparatory schools, were being educated at parental sacrifice, and many were in debt to a friend or a fund. The faculty numbered about twenty-five. The college could not pay adequate salaries, and thus was not able to retain its best teachers, who, having gained the experience which made them valuable, promptly sought other positions.

This morning the beautiful prospect for which Granger was famed was blotted out by a March blizzard which had begun with a soft fall of wet snow early in the evening and had not yet reached its climax. As the temperature fell and the wind rose, the wet flakes hardened into stinging crystals, and Dean Preston, sitting in her office, constructed in imagination and against her conscience a picture of the planet yielding to final hideous cold and encircled in clouds like those which she beheld. Miss Preston was very tall and painfully thin and her blood ran slowly. She had taught since she was sixteen, even while she studied at Granger College, and she had acquired her doctor's degree by the most exhausting combination of teaching and studying. She had hoped eventually to teach in a college, but she had never expected to be the head of a college. Her work was successful, but she was always anxious; there were always inefficient teachers, always lazy or idle pupils, and occasionally — but very occasionally, so isolated was Granger — there was a love affair which must be quenched.

Miss Preston thought now, turning her attention from the whirling snow, of her latest anxiety. The misgivings with which she had admitted Phebe Stannard had been justified, and she meant to summon Phebe and try to learn whether she was stupid or indifferent.

Having read late and ignorant of the interview which awaited her, Phebe finished before she rose a "Life of Balzac."

It was Saturday, and she had no school appointments but her music lesson at eleven. Her dreary summer had given her the systematic knowledge promised her and with it a fondness for systematic rather than desultory reading. She had begun also to distinguish differences in style and to enjoy works of literary analysis. The art of writing was as impossible to her as the art of painting, and the very act, since her essay at poetical composition, distasteful, but she had begun to understand its laws.

Having risen and dressed, she sought the only friend whom she had made, Gertrude Dennis, the librarian. She was not interested in her fellow students nor were they in her. A reception committee, calling upon her, was received without cordiality, and thereafter she was let alone.

Gertrude Dennis was a small, cheerful, blonde maiden of thirty, who had made her way with the assistance of five aunts who lived together in New York. Denied a thorough education by the chivalrous prejudice of an aristocratic and incapable father, sanguine even in complete ruin, the sisters had supplemented their knowledge in night schools. Margaret and Mary turned the old house into a boarding-house, Elizabeth worked in a bookstore, Flora in the public library, and Irene in a publishing house. To Gertrude, the orphan daughter of their brother, they transferred all their ambitions, looking forward to the day when she should have an important position. Gertrude was curt, positive, restless, enthusiastic, and superbly efficient. She longed to return to New York, the one place in the United States where people really lived. A graduate of Radcliffe College and of the Albany Library School, she not only had the technical details of library work at her finger-tips, but she knew and loved books.

When Phebe stopped at her desk, she looked up and smiled. Disagreeing with Miss Crane, she believed that books were

written to be read, and she granted many privileges to those who read them. She liked Phebe better than any student who had been in Granger College in her time, and hearing of her summer work at Leesburg, she arranged for her to give the same sort of assistance in the Granger library in the coming summer.

"Got through with your 'Balzac'?" she asked briskly. "Some old boy!" In spite of her Radcliffe degree Gertrude loved, used and advocated slang.

"Yes," answered Phebe, "I want 'Cousin Pons.'"

Gertrude folded her arms as though she held Cousin Pons there and did not mean to let him go.

"Don't read him in English," she begged. "In another year, if you'll study" — she, too, knew that Phebe did not study — "you'll be able to read French easily. I'll read with you an hour a day this summer."

Phebe promised to abstain. She was grateful to Miss Dennis and she liked her, but she did not love her. She did not put her quite into the class of Miss McGrath, however; it was too early to say that Gertrude had altogether failed in life's true aim.

"Don't you have your music lesson now?" asked Gertrude.

"It's at eleven o'clock."

"Well, come back afterwards." Gertrude looked at her smilingly. "Won't you love I. Tolstoi!"

Phebe made a grimace, then she went out the door, walking lazily. I. Tolstoi was a frequent figure in Gertrude's conversation, but her remarks furnished no clue to his character, business, or even his sex. Gertrude watched the departing figure with sharp eyes. There was something the matter with the girl; she seemed to have enough money and to be free of anxiety and she had a good mind, but she lacked what

Gertrude called "pep." She had decided that some time she would take Phebe to New York — if there was any ambition in her, a visit to New York would quicken it.

Phebe went down a long hall and climbed a stairway to the chapel which had the same relative position in the great E of the Granger college building as the chapel at Leesburg. She seemed to be going over an old round; then she remembered that she was a different person. Todd would not meet her at the next corner, he would not stand near her in chapel, turning to express his pleasure in her playing. Her step slowed, then quickened — in a few moments she would forget everything while she had her organ lesson. She had come to understand the value of soporifics.

The music teacher, Professor Bland, a large man with a bald head and a golden beard, awaited her at the organ. He had abundant technical skill and an entire lack of taste. He played elaborate fugues perfectly, but if they had been founded upon the theme of "Yankee Doodle" or "Ta-ra-ra-ra-boom-de-ay," he would have liked them just as well. He used approved instruction books, and selected classical compositions for his recital programmes, but when he took the Glee Club to sing in towns where there was a Granger constituency, he drilled them in second- or third-rate selections. He was immensely vain, of his long hands with their tremendous reach, of his accuracy — he boasted that he had never made a mistake in a recital, and of his degree of Doctor of Music. The members of the faculty who had knowledge of music despised him, but he was valuable because he accepted a comparatively small salary and was an excellent drillmaster.

Phebe was his pride. The mechanical quality of her playing was to him no defect, and she was the only pupil he had who practiced rather than played and who asked intelligent questions. He gave her extra time and permitted her to

use the fine, new chapel organ instead of an ancient instrument in one of the music rooms. He liked Phebe also for herself. His natural vanity and his confidence in his ability to charm had been somewhat blunted by the difficulty of supporting a wife and three children, but in the presence of Phebe these emotions revived. He was often careless of his dress, but he always came immaculately clad to her lesson. This morning he gave her almost fulsome praise, not suspecting that she despised his musical catholicity, and that personally he offended her.

The Granger office boy, who awaited her outside the chapel, was more polite than Joseph, but she blushed at his summons and began to feel ashamed as she followed him. Entering the office, she did not notice the sudden change in Miss Preston's expression. Phebe was so young, so erect, so rosy-cheeked, so direct of gaze, so sure of herself, and she was so old, so faded, so tired. She was conscious of the uncanny thinness of her long body, of the teeth which crowded her mouth and showed so plainly when she talked. She thought of her thin gray hair while she looked at Phebe's crowning braid.

"Sit down, Miss Stannard."

Phebe sat down, her cheeks growing redder. She had wasted whole days dreaming over her disappointing life.

The Dean folded her hands and began to speak. To her there was something cruel about Phebe's eyes.

"Miss Stannard, as you know, you were admitted to Granger College, by way of experiment, with less preparation than is usually required, and you are not doing well." Miss Preston glanced at a paper on her desk. "Miss Catterson reports that you are negligent and your themes are carelessly written and are not handed in promptly. She has been teaching here since the college opened, thirty-six years

ago" — Phebe saw Miss Catterson, bent, almost blind, and a little deaf — "and she says that she has never had a more promising or a more disappointing pupil. Miss Rogers deplores your lack of interest in her course" — to Phebe Miss Rogers, the teacher of Bible, was Wilhelmina Herr with twenty added years — "and so on with all your teachers.

"The first remedy will be to stop your music lessons, and if that is not efficacious, you will have to drop back to the lower class. This will affect others beside yourself; many an ambitious girl would like to do what you are doing, but the experiment will not be repeated."

Phebe said not a word, believing she did not care. Looking at her steadily, the Dean, like Gertrude, recognized an element in her character or her situation which she did not understand.

"You wouldn't like to give up your organ lessons, I suppose?"

"No," said Phebe, at last.

"A thorough musician must have a thorough education."

"Yes," said Phebe.

The Dean crossed her left knee over her right, and so thin was she that only the vamp of her shoe was exhibited.

"What am I to say to Dr. Todd?"

Phebe looked quickly down at her hands. But she gave herself away; Miss Preston had an even more intimate acquaintance with the feminine heart than Todd.

"Has he inquired about me?"

"Yes. Moreover, he's coming to deliver the Commencement address."

"You mean that he inquired for me specifically?"

The Dean handed her a letter.

"I am anxious to know how Phebe Stannard is getting on," wrote Todd.

A dreadful necessity came upon Phebe. A hundred times in the last month tears had burned behind her eyelids, but she had stayed them there. Now they rushed out in a flood. She bowed her head, unable to speak, and the Dean rose and made certain that the door was closed.

"Your failure is no reproach if you have done your best," she said when the flood diminished. "Have you?"

"No," confessed Phebe.

"Will you for the remainder of the year?"

Phebe nodded; then she fled, and in her room she stood breathing heavily, her back against the closed door. He had inquired for her! — he still had her in mind!

"I'm a fool!" she said angrily aloud. "A fool!"

But she set to work.

II

Todd accepted Miss Preston's invitation with satisfaction. It was a compliment for the principal of a Normal School to be invited to make the Commencement address at a College, even though the College was not of the first rank and a woman's college at that. The aged headmaster of the boys' school whom he wished to succeed was still holding his position, but he was growing feeble. Todd meant to see that the account of his address at Granger College reached each member of the Board of Trustees, and by way of preparation he sent an abstract to the Granger newspaper.

As he traveled to Granger, he thought of Phebe Stannard. Miss Preston failed to answer his inquiry in the winter, but in her recent letter she said that Phebe had done well. He had looked forward to seeing Phebe; there was a tribute in her straightforward gray eyes which was unmistakable. It was a look which he often saw, but not from eyes so bright and intelligent. How quickly she had re-

sponded to the spur of his encouraging word! He recalled that his parting from her had been abrupt, but he had been busy, and one could not, of course, go beyond a certain point in one's relation to one's attractive women students.

He noticed that the campus was not in perfect order, the grass along the paths was ragged, the trees needed trimming, and the buildings needed paint. He remembered with satisfaction Leesburg's trim appearance, and forgetting that the care of the property was paid for, like his salary, by the State, he deplored the inefficiency of women. While he waited in the drawing-room, he fancied himself with a humorous shiver as the head of a school in which five hundred girls admired him.

Miss Preston was for the moment detained — the office boy brought her excuses without explaining that she had sent him to ask Miss Stannard to go to the drawing-room. Miss Preston had confidence in Todd's common sense, and she believed that it was kind to Phebe to let her see him. It was hard to realize that Phebe had once burst into tears; her look was now so steady and her head was held so high. She had done excellent work, so good that, in considering the students as future teachers in Granger, Miss Preston marked her as most promising.

Todd sat down, but only for a moment. He was aware, as he was always aware of this particular piece of furniture, of a tremendous mirror hung between two windows and reaching almost from floor to ceiling. Clasping his hands behind him he walked the length of the long room, returned, saw himself approaching, passed out of his own area of vision, turned, paced away from the mirror and back again. In the middle of the floor he felt an irresistible temptation. He glanced over his shoulder — there was, so far as he could see, but one door, and he could watch it from where he stood.

He lifted his arm in the eloquent gesture with which he planned to conclude his address, lowered it, and paced on. Reaching the end of the room he turned, strode the full length of the velvet carpet, turned, approached the mirror, lifted his arm again, lowered it, and walked on. He repeated this satisfying performance four times.

Why did not Miss Preston appear? — women were astonishingly informal and undeferential. But he was not impatient; he would pace the room again, and study his gesture once more. In this determination, he erred sadly. He had raised his hand above his head when he saw a figure in the heavily curtained doorway and recognized Phebe. The dreaded mischance had happened, he had been caught admiring himself! The shock was so great that there was only one way in which to meet it. He persuaded himself instantly that she had just arrived, and that her gaze could not penetrate into the room.

"Miss Stannard!" he said quickly. "How nice to see you!"

Phebe put her hand into his outstretched palm. She was smiling, and Todd believed that it was with delight. But as an evildoer is prepared for a sudden conversion by a long period of half-unconscious repentance, so had Phebe been prepared by months of development for a sudden escape from her obsession. She had two objects for her mirth — Todd was one; Phebe Stannard the other. She had been in love with this man who could stand and study himself in a looking-glass! She had seen four out of his six poses and she knew now that he was always posing. And she had dreamed of him, had written poetry about him! She had thought oftener of him than of Uncle Heimbach or Beulah, or Beulah's little boy. She had thought of him ten times oftener than she had remembered Aunt Cassie.

All these reflections passed rapidly through her mind while Todd still held her hand. She drew it away.

"I hope Mrs. Todd is well," she said, smiling pleasantly.

"Very well," said Todd. "I hear you have distinguished yourself."

"Thank you," smiled Phebe.

There was a stir at the door, and Miss Preston entered.

"Have you been standing all this time?" she asked in concern.

"Miss Stannard has just arrived," explained Todd. Phebe smiled again, a tiny, quivering smile. Miss Preston glanced at her as she stood in the bright light — clearly she had been mistaken about her interest in Todd. When Phebe had got herself away, considerately and without awkwardness, she began to talk about her.

"A brilliant girl. But the more I see of her, the less I think we are safe in using her as a precedent."

Phebe went slowly toward the library, walking between jardinières filled with daisies and laurel and wild azalea fetched by the seniors from the near-by hills. She found Gertrude looking up at a tier of books, her round, neat little head tipped back, her lips puckered.

"I'm going to begin here," she announced. "Some job."

"I've just seen Dr. Todd," said Phebe. "He has arrived."

"Has he?" said Gertrude. "I met him once. I thought him a vain creature."

Phebe laughed. "He is that!" Greatly to Gertrude's amazement, Phebe hugged her suddenly as she hugged Beulah, her strong arms almost crushing the little figure. "Let's go for a long walk this afternoon."

"All right. But clear out now." For a moment she held Phebe back. "I tell you what I'm going to do some

summer. I'm going to take a party abroad to earn my own expenses."

"Without having been abroad yourself?"

"Surely. I know Baedeker like my Library Bulletin. Anybody with sense could do it. Don't you think I mean it?"

"I think you'd go to the South Pole if you wanted to," answered Phebe.

She walked out the front door and across the lawn to a bench at the top of the cliff, where she sat looking down at river and woodland and miles of waving grain, her cheeks fanned by the soft breeze, and there for a brief moment tasted a new joy. She, Phebe Stannard, was an individual, indestructible, unique, bound to no one. Todd was nothing — let him go. She shrugged her shoulders as though she shook him off. Her elation demanded a physical expression; she longed to launch out like a bird into the sunny depths at her feet.

But suddenly she felt a new, yet at the same time an old, sensation. Something warm seemed to trickle into her heart, drop by drop. She saw herself in Millerstown in the late summer. She would sit on the porch and hear Beulah tell the news, and she would look across at the hotel.

"I'm sorry you're not going to be in Millerstown," Crusen said when he bade her good-bye.

"Think of all the time you've sat on the hotel porch alone!" she answered gayly and indifferently.

"If I'd only been acquainted with you!" said Crusen.

She saw his keen, steady eyes, his thick, light hair with its beautiful, closely clipped wave, his slender, sinewy, well-cared-for body — Todd was a fat man! She heard his crisp, perfectly enunciating voice and she remembered the accidental touch of his knee. She sat as still, as bright-eyed, as intent as the squirrel which watched her from a tree.

III

PHEBE sat with rheumatic Vinnie Most in her little house at the edge of Millerstown. Here Vinnie was less forlorn than in church or on the street; one did not contrast her twisted form with straight forms or measure her tiny, halting step against the long distance she had walked. The house stood far back under the shoulder of Ellen Young's sloping fields, and between it and the street was a thick hedge of lilac bushes, and shadowing it were a catalpa tree, a honey-locust, and a polonia, the only specimens of their kind in the county. In one corner of the yard was a thicket of bright goldenglow, in another a thick, delicious-smelling mass of red bergamot.

Sitting by the window, Phebe heard the bees humming in the bergamot. She looked across the grass, embroidered with the delicate pattern of the honey-locust, to the mass of dark red flowers and then down at her sewing. She had come home the day before yesterday and would be in Millerstown for three weeks, during which time Vinnie was to make her winter dresses with her help. Vinnie hesitated to cut into the fine materials unless Phebe was there, and she was afraid that without advice she could not give the garments the proper style. They had cut out a blue dress and were at work upon it, and Phebe was to have a fitting before she went home to supper.

Vinnie sat in a low chair with one poor leg stretched out straight. She moved with exquisite pain at which she laughed defiantly.

"You should see me working till I get up in the morning. That's a show, I can tell you!"

Phebe sewed silently, thinking of Crusen. This evening she would sit on the porch and he would see her from the hotel. His face floated against the background of cool shadow

and bright flowers. She looked up suddenly as if she expected him to appear in the flesh, but she saw only the yard, and beyond the fields of Ellen Young the sagging roof of the old mill with a sycamore towering above it against the little mountain.

"Did you speak to me?" she said suddenly to Vinnie.

"No," answered Vinnie. She loved to watch Phebe, to look at her crown of bright hair and at her rosy cheeks. She loved her youth, but she did not envy her, or think Phebe's gray eyes cruel.

"You didn't always live here alone, did you?" Phebe asked to cover her confusion. "There was some one who lived with you, who got married, wasn't there?"

"I lived with her, not she with me," corrected Vinnie. She liked to tell stories, and she remembered many which everybody else had forgotten and which would perish when she died. Now she threaded three needles. To sit in her quiet room and talk to Phebe — what could be pleasanter? "Her name was Mary Good."

"Oh, yes!" said Phebe. "Tell me about her."

"Well, I will," consented Vinnie. "She was my company girl when we went to school. Ellen Young was in our school, too."

Phebe looked across the fields at the fine farm house which belonged to Ellen Young, who seemed much younger than Vinnie.

"She's five years older than I," said Vinnie, as though she read Phebe's thoughts. "There was a boy in the school, Horace Berger. He was crazy about Ellen from the first, but Ellen had no intention of marrying him, not for a minute, though she led him on. Her father and mother didn't like him; he was poor; he lived with his mother in this little house. He learned the printer's trade and he ran after Ellen.

But he had to go to work in Reading, and one day they came from Reading when he was here over Sunday and fetched him to jail. They said he had stolen. Ellen made out she didn't like him, but it wasn't true — she used to walk with him on the mountain.

"He never was any crazier after Ellen than Mary Good was after him. When he went to jail, she lived with his mother and took care of her."

"But he didn't steal," said Phebe. "I remember that much."

"No," said Vinnie. "He got a better lawyer and he got out. But his mother had died by that time, and he didn't come back. The squire went to Reading to find him, but he had gone away. Mary said I should come to live with her. The house was mortgaged and she bought it in. He was gone for twenty years.

"One evening I was sitting at the window, and Mary was in the garden weeding. It was so dark I could hardly see her any more. A man came across the grass, and he said, 'Is anybody here?' It was Horace Berger, and he had come back rich."

"To thank Mary?" asked Phebe.

"No," said Vinnie. "Of course not! To court Ellen."

"Why, how old was she?" asked Phebe, amazed.

Vinnie looked up and laughed. "Oh, between forty and forty-five. She was a good-looking woman then — she's a good-looking woman now. He had stopped to see the garden. He could see that it was as his mother had kept it, but he supposed it was just by accident. He talked to Mary a long time."

"Could you hear them?"

"Every word. He asked her about everybody, and at last about Ellen Young."

"Did she say that Ellen hadn't stood up for him?"

"Not she!" said Vinnie. "She was too proud. She let him go on to see Ellen. The next evening, before dark, Ellen came across the field. She was getting fat, but she was beautiful. 'Here, Mary,' she said, short, like that. 'You sewed this hook on wrong. Horace Berger is here from California.'

"The hook wasn't wrong, but Mary changed it. The next evening Ellen came again. She blamed Mary because her dress was tight. It was because she was getting fat.

"'Here, Mary,' she said. 'Fasten your tight dress. Horace Berger is coming.' Her voice shook and trembled."

"Did she know that Mary cared for him?"

"Everybody knew it. 'I made fine cake,' she said. 'And ice-cream.'"

"Could no one do anything?" asked Phebe.

"Yes," said Vinnie. "I did something. The next evening Mary went to town, and when he went by, I called him and I asked him why he went to see Ellen."

"You did!"

"To be sure, I did. I wasn't proud like Mary. He said that Ellen was his friend; she had sent him money, when he was in prison, and if it hadn't been for that, he couldn't have proved himself innocent."

" 'Ellen sent you money!' I said to him. 'How did Ellen send you money?'

" 'Through a lawyer,' he said.

" 'No,' I said, 'Ellen denounced you. It was Mary Good who sent you money.'

" 'I sent it back,' he said, 'and Ellen wouldn't take it.'

" 'Ellen never heard of it,' I said. 'It was Mary wouldn't have it back.'"

"And he married Mary?"

"He did."

"How old was she?"

"About as old as Ellen. It was twenty years ago."

Phebe went on with her sewing. "Tell me another story, Vinnie."

Vinnie chuckled and took a fresh needle. "I could tell you about Nicholas Ainey."

"Who was he?"

Vinnie hobbled the length of the room and returned to her low chair.

"Nicholas had the rheumatism," she laughed. "He was a shoemaker, and he had two wives and they died. He was a little man with sharp eyes and a hook nose. He worried always because other people didn't do what was right, and by and by he decided to tell them how they should act and he wrote such anonymous letters in printing and signed them in a queer way. When he was a young man, he got tattooed in the Reading Fair with a big Indian on his arm and underneath the words, 'The Avenger.' No one had ever seen this but his wives, and they were dead, so he signed his letters this way.

"He told a farmer he oughtn't to paint his chicken legs yellow before he took them to the Fair, and he told a miller he took too much toll from the poor, and he told a woman what her niece was going to do. He didn't know this niece, he just heard there was such a woman. Her aunt was going to will her the old dishes so they should all be kept together, but the niece had already agreed with a dealer for a price. Nicholas wrote this to the niece's aunt. He didn't know her either.

"By and by he thought he would marry for the third time, and he picked out this very niece. But he didn't know she was this woman. She was a widow — her name was Mrs.

Abner Hartline, and she had money and a fine home. She was a cross woman, but she liked Nicholas.

"One Sunday he went to see her and he talked about his rheumatism, and she said she would rub his arm with liniment — she had such good home-made liniment — and as she rubbed, she talked. She told all about her aunt and the dishes and the letter of this avenger, and how another niece got the dishes and sold them, anyhow, and how the other niece got the old clock and five thousand dollars and everything, and she was saying what she would do to this avenger, and all the time she was rubbing, and pushing up Nicholas's sleeve, and rubbing and pushing up his sleeve."

"Gracious!" cried Phebe. "Didn't he think in time?"

"Not he," said Vinnie. "She saw it. It was very plain. 'The Avenger.' She chased him out of the house and down the pike, and it all came out."

Phebe laughed. "Yet an outsider might think Millerstown was dull!"

"There's nothing dull about Millerstown," declared Vinnie.

Phebe rose and folded her work. "I must go home. It's almost supper time."

"You have beautiful goods," said Vinnie.

"I tried to get what would wear well," said Phebe, who had spent more than she ought. Her father's checks came with increasing irregularity.

At the supper table Uncle Heimbach spoke about money. William Neuweiler had finished his meal and had returned to the store, Beulah sat by the window with her baby in her arms, and Aunt Rosie was stepping back and forth from the sink to the table.

"Do you need anything, Phebe?"

Phebe felt a pang of shame — Uncle Heimbach would be amazed if he knew what she spent for clothes.

"No," she said hesitatingly.

"You have only to ask," he reminded her.

"Thank you, Uncle," said Phebe. "I know that."

Aunt Rosie declined her help. "You sit on the porch. I guess you're tired enough sewing."

"I'll come for a little while, too," promised Beulah.

Phebe was frightened — suppose the presence of Beulah and the baby should keep Crusen away! Probably Uncle Heimbach would come also, in his shirt-sleeves with his evening paper, and Aunt Rosie would follow. But Crusen should see that she was there. She sat down, not on one of the chairs with its white towel, but in a more conspicuous position on the step.

Happily Heimbach walked up the street, and Aunt Rosie sat on the back porch and of Beulah Crusen was clearly not afraid. He walked across as soon as he saw Phebe and shook hands with her. Beulah grew red and then white, experiencing all the wretchedness of the moments when she had thrust herself upon Hilarius and Phebe. She must stay with them; she did not know what her father would say if he found them alone. She was further embarrassed when Crusen addressed her as Mrs. Neuweiler, which she had not been called a dozen times since her marriage.

"Mrs. Neuweiler, I want to take your cousin to the furnace to see the cast."

"Yes, well," said Beulah, almost crying at the alacrity with which Phebe rose.

"We won't be gone long," promised Crusen.

"That is right," said Beulah unhappily. "It gets early dark."

IV

PHEBE and Crusen went round the house on the boardwalk and Aunt Rosie smiled as they passed. The superintendent walking with Phebe! But it was no more than was to be expected. Crusen was amused at himself for inviting Phebe to accompany him, but he looked with pleasure at her strong young shoulders, her bare head, and the back of her white neck.

"That is my tree," said Phebe gayly. "It's to stand as long as I live."

"I'm fond of this walk," said Crusen. "Yonder's the marshy place where the children get calamus. I suppose you've gone there often."

"Yes, indeed," said Phebe.

"The old lady over there" — Crusen pointed to the furnace — "is behaving as she should."

"Why was the furnace built here?" Phebe knew the reason, but she suspected that Crusen liked to talk about his business.

"Because of the local deposit of iron. The worked-out veins in the neighborhood are brown hematite. Up on the hill there is magnetite. That can't be washed away from the clay; it must be crushed."

"Are those veins worked out, too?" asked Phebe.

"Probably," said Crusen shortly. He took her arm and helped her over the railroad track. "Of course you understand the operation of a furnace."

"In a general way," said Phebe. She had the same feeling of gratitude that she had toward Todd when he praised her ability.

Crusen kept one hand on her arm and pointed with the other at the cylindrical stack and the surrounding buildings.

"It looks like a cathedral. Tell me what you know about it."

"You put ore and fuel and limestone into the stack and set it all on fire, and the iron melts and runs to the bottom, and the limestone combines with the earth and other impurities of the iron and is tapped out part way up," said Phebe bravely.

"Exactly. And the gases of combustion?"

"They escape at the top."

Crusen shook his head. "That was what happened in the dark ages." He opened the door of a brick-paved building. "Here are the boilers in which we make steam, and with that we pump the water to fill the boilers and also the water for cooling purposes, and we make the power for the blowing engines. But we do it with the gas from the furnace — here's the connection."

"It's like the chicken and the egg!" cried Phebe. "You use the power to run the furnace and you use the furnace gas to make the power."

"You have a mind!" said Crusen, smiling. "We start off with coal. Down there are the coal grates and over there are the pumps. The steam enters here, and here are all the water connections. Here are the blowing engines. The manufacture of iron advanced tremendously when some one thought of heating the blast. Listen!" Crusen opened a door in the side of an enormous pipe, within which the blast roared.

"A fine place to dry your hair," commented Phebe practically.

"There's a better place over here." Crusen led the way to another building and opened a similar door. "Put your hand in."

"It's hot!" said Phebe.

"It's the hot blast. These stoves are the latest construction. Here is my office." He unlocked the door of a little building and stood looking in over Phebe's shoulder. "Of course

you've been in the cast-house," he said as he locked the door.

"Yes," said Phebe. "But never with any one who knew much about it."

"You seem to understand the principle. Up the side of the stack in that hoist go the ore and coal and limestone, and into that lined and double-lined and water-cooled pot they are dumped, and they come out as you know — the iron at the bottom, the cinder a little way up, and the gas at the top. The iron is run into moulds, the cinder goes off to the dump. It sounds easy, doesn't it?"

"I know exactly how easy it is," said Phebe. "Especially when you have a hot spot on the lining or a blow-out."

Crusen took her arm, warm and smooth under her thin sleeve. Of the many women he had known, none had been acquainted with a furnace.

"Come into the cast-house," he said. "They're getting ready."

He dropped Phebe's arm, and walking beside her let her find her way to the nearest of the archways. Under his management the yard was as smooth as a lawn. The cast-house, illuminated by flaming torches, was inside as well as out like a vast church; far overhead arched a vaulted roof, and the regular moulds in the deep sand on the floor suggested pews. The huge stack vanished upward into blackness like a mighty organ, its thick wall of fire-brick and steel giving no glimpse of the molten turmoil within.

Phebe had seen the operation of casting many times, but she had never watched it so intently or with such delight. A man knelt before the stack as though before a mysterious altar, in his hands a long bar, too heavy to look like a wand, yet none the less a wonder-working implement. He held the point against the hardened clay of the tapping-hole, and be-

hind him two men lifted ponderous sledges to drive it in. Deftly turning and twisting the drill, he seemed to be oblivious to the danger from a miscarriage of the powerful strokes, although a mistake of a half-inch might have crushed his arm or his head. The two men smote as carelessly as though they were knocking the head out of a barrel.

Suddenly the kneeling man gave a loud shout, and with a smaller bar, which glowed and bent in the terrific heat, thrust deep into the crucible. At once with a roar came the iron, brilliant, slow-flowing, golden. It ran out into the moulds, giving off blue sparks, and, where the sand was moist, flames leaped. Directed by an imperious giant who stood almost upon the iron itself, the men sprang about like demons, lifting iron spades in their leather-mittened hands, damming the flood or leading it into new courses. Phebe had known the giant always; he was the mildest and dullest soul alive. Perhaps he was mild and dull away from the furnace because here he had his fill of excitement and danger.

Quickly the light paled as a dark scum formed on the pigs. The tapping-hole was dammed to remain closed for another six hours. The voices grew less strident, there were pauses for breath, and for the resting of strained muscles.

"It's over," announced Crusen.

Phebe went with him toward the archway where the air felt deliciously cool against their hot cheeks. There was still a rosy glow in the west as though the flame of the cast were reflected there.

"You like it?" asked Crusen.

"I've always liked it," said Phebe. She wished to add, "But never so well as to-night."

They returned by the road, and not by the fields on which the dew was falling, and Crusen sat for a few minutes on the porch. He was interested in Phebe, but not enough to make

him forget that he had had a long day and that to-morrow he was going away for two weeks.

"When you come back, I'll be gone," said Phebe.

"The world is small," answered Crusen pleasantly. "I believe in a fate which brings congenial spirits together."

He shook hands and crossed the street, and with this small portion of a feast Phebe's hunger was for the moment amply satisfied. She laid her hand on the latch of the screen door, then she gave a cry of alarm. It was not like Beulah to eavesdrop, but Beulah stood within.

"I was coming out," she explained, tremendously relieved. Phebe was safely back and Heimbach had not seen her with Crusen; moreover, they parted like strangers.

"I'm sleepy," said Phebe, longing for the quiet of her own room. "Good-night, Sister Neuweiler."

"Good-night," said Beulah.

In another instant Heimbach hurried up the steps.

"I saw the superintendent at the gate," he said sharply. "What did he want here?"

"He asked Phebe to walk with him to the furnace. They weren't gone long."

"I won't have it!" said Heimbach excitedly.

Beulah's voice was that of a mother soothing her child.

"*Ach*, they hardly know each other! He's going away to-morrow, and when he comes back she'll be gone. The people say he will leave soon for good."

Heimbach dropped heavily into the nearest chair.

"Have you anything particular against him?" Beulah asked gently.

"I have something against all these smart English ones," said Heimbach. "Sooner than have him trick our Phebe, I would tell her everything."

"Not about her mother!" said Beulah, aghast and forgetting herself.

Heimbach peered at Beulah through the darkness. "Did Mom tell you?" he asked.

"No," said Beulah, embarrassed and ashamed. "I guessed it."

"It's all true," said Heimbach. "And if it had to be, I would tell Phebe."

V

Again Phebe sat in Vinnie Most's room. Vinnie, her room, her garden — all were exactly as they had been last summer. The bees hummed in the red bergamot, the delicate pattern of the honey-locust lay upon the grass, the sky showed clear and blue between the branches of the catalpa and the polonia. Tall corn hid the sagging roof of the mill, but the towering sycamore could be seen against the curving flank of the mountain.

Phebe and Vinnie were preparing Phebe's wardrobe for her senior year. Some of the clothes they had made last summer were worth renovating; others were worn out. The new materials were fewer than last summer and not so fine. Stannard's remittances had still further diminished.

Beulah had another little boy — there was every reason why Phebe should sew at Vinnie Most's. Beulah rejoiced; she hoped she might have six children at least. She had health and a cheerful spirit and with each new baby the elder Neuweiler solemnly presented her with another house.

Phebe was not the Phebe of last summer — she was quieter, and when Vinnie could give her no sewing, she took up the volume of de Maupassant she had brought with her. Thanks to Gertrude's help and her own diligence, she could read de Maupassant in his native tongue only a little less slowly than she could read English or German.

"Can you understand that book?" asked Vinnie.

"Oh, yes," said Phebe, amused.

"Is it a novel?"

"No; it's a collection of stories."

"Tell me one of them, Phebe."

Phebe blushed. "You wouldn't like them, Vinnie. Some day I'll bring something that you'll like."

"Could you look at a French book and tell me the English?"

"I hope so."

"I think that's wonderful," said Vinnie. She pronounced it "wonder-ful!"

Phebe took up her sewing. The bees still hummed, the shadows still lay on the grass, the sky was still an empty dome. Suddenly the bees ceased to hum; everything was perfectly quiet. Phebe laid down her sewing, her hand paralyzed. She looked at Vinnie's twisted form with eyes that were cold and cruel — even Vinnie would have called them so. But Vinnie was not looking at them.

"We have dreadful things round here, too," she said. "There was Weidner; he was an awful man. He's dead now."

"Is he?" said Phebe vaguely.

"And that outland woman is put away," Vinnie went on. "With her baby. She is crazy. I guess Ambrose was glad to get rid of them. He is still studying to be a preacher."

"Is he?" Phebe's eyes were not only cold and cruel, they were hungry. Crusen was not here; he had disappointed her expectations of twelve long months. He had been gone from Millerstown, she learned, for six. To be old like Vinnie, to lose one's good looks, to have gray, disfiguring threads in one's hair, to watch one's smooth skin growing dry and wrinkled — how unspeakably dreadful! She had once put a black velvet ribbon round her neck, and Gertrude had said

laughingly, "Don't do that till you must, Phebe!" She lifted her hand now to her firmly arching throat. It seemed to her that the flesh was not quite smooth.

"I'll have to go, Vinnie," she announced suddenly. "I can't sit still. How do you work all day?"

"I'm used to it," said Vinnie. "Come to-morrow. We'll get through, never fear."

Phebe pushed open the screen door, her book under her arm. She would walk until she forgot Crusen. She went through a side gate into the field, encircling it on the grass border until she reached the old mill. Her fixed glance took in none of its beauty; she was busy with her thoughts and with her footsteps as she stepped over the beams on the race-box and went down the meadow. She leaped the brook, climbed a fence, crossed a stubble-field, and came out on the mountain road, on which she had walked to meet Hilarius Hersh. She remembered Hilarius with a curving lip; she thought of Todd, but her lip did not curl.

"I wasn't a child then," she said to herself. "I was grown up and a fool."

She remembered the text of Mr. Weygandt's sermon on the happy evening when Hilarius had invited her to walk. "*And she shall follow after her lovers and shall not overtake them.*" He had meant the pleasures of this world, but she thought of Hilarius and Todd and Crusen — she had sought after them, and even Hilarius had not let her overtake him. As she came to the opening into the woods, she remembered white-faced Ambrose with his pious ambition. The old uneasiness returned absurdly — the thought of Ambrose was like a quickened conscience.

The steepness of the road took the spring out of her step, but she found forgetfulness in her exertion, and plodded on. A team passed, but she did not lift her head. When the

noise of its wheels ceased, she heard another climbing the road behind her. She was thinking of Granger College — she could see its vast, homely front, she could smell cooking and strong, unpleasant laboratory chemicals. She thought of Gertrude. Sometimes Gertrude was a person of flashing wit, of whimsical, irresistible charm; now Phebe thought of her clear blue eyes, of her smooth, fine, uncurled blonde hair, with aversion. Gertrude seemed to her to be a creature without sex.

She wished that the buggy coming behind her would pass, and she helped it by slackening her pace. Her longing to see Crusen became suddenly intense, weakening and enervating her frame so that she found it difficult to walk. The nose of the horse was even with her shoulder, then his body — he, too, found the hot hill steep. It was not polite to let the stranger pass without a greeting, but she kept her eyes obstinately upon the dust.

The buggy was five yards ahead when, annoyed, she realized that it had stopped. She did not wish to see any one, much less speak to any one. The stranger turned in the seat, his elbow crooked across the uncurtained back, and looked at her earnestly. A long moment passed before she recognized Crusen's uncovered blond head, his keen dark eyes, his smiling mouth.

"Miss Stannard!" he called. "Is that you?"

"Yes," said Phebe. She stood still, the power of motion gone. He was here — Crusen — in the midst of her despair. The aspect of the world changed; down stretched the road to dear, quaint Millerstown with its shady streets, its gardens filled with flowers, its kind, kind hearts. Up wound the road through the beautiful wood with its tall oaks and hickories, its moss-covered rocks, and its springs of water. Down in Millerstown, Beulah and Uncle Heimbach and Vinnie Most

and many others loved her. At Granger, Gertrude thought of her and planned for her. In the world, crept two insects called Hilarius Hersh and Dr. Todd. Creeping somewhere was another insect called Ambrose Weidner who had dared in his heart to condemn her. Before her in the road, in short, waited Crusen.

"Are you coming this way?" he asked. "Or shall I back down to you?"

"I'm coming that way," answered Phebe, blushing.

"What is your ultimate destination?" asked Crusen.

"I haven't any," said Phebe. Oh, that he would invite her to ride!

This was what he did, after a moment's imperceptible hesitation.

"Would you scorn this humble vehicle?"

"I've ridden in worse." To Phebe the buggy was a chariot.

"I'm going into the woods to look at some abandoned mine workings." He pulled out his watch. "It's four o'clock — we should be back easily by seven. Would you like to go with me?"

"Yes," said Phebe steadily.

Crusen held out his hand and she climbed up beside him. He laid the dust-cloth across her knees and chirruped to the horse.

"Isn't this jolly? I supposed you were away." He implied that he had thought of Phebe as a companion — in reality he had not thought of her for a year. "Last summer I instructed you in the manufacture of iron — now I shall show you how it grows. What have you been doing all winter?"

"Studying," said Phebe, "and practicing the pipe-organ."

"Isn't the pipe-organ very difficult to play?"

"No," explained Phebe. "Not so difficult as the piano.

You do mechanically, by changing the registration, what you have to do with the tips of your fingers on the piano. The piano is harder."

Crusen's eyes sharpened, and he put out his hand and took from her lap Phebe's forgotten book. He looked at the title, shifted the book open with one hand, and glanced at the text. "Did your teacher give you this?"

"A friend who reads with me did," said Phebe. "She persuaded me not to use translations, and now I can read easily."

"Are you going to teach music?"

"No, I couldn't stand the mistakes."

"Are you going to teach anything?"

"I hope not."

"You should do post-graduate work," advised Crusen lightly. "Didn't I tell you this before? Come to New York, to Columbia."

"Where do you live in New York?"

"When I'm there, I live in a bachelor apartment at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Fourth Street, opposite the University Club."

"Do you travel about?"

"Yes." He did not care to discuss his business with Phebe, and he became suddenly preoccupied, wondering whether he had been wise to bring her with him. At the summit of the hill, he turned into a by-road.

"I've always wanted to come up here," said Phebe. She took off her hat and laid it on her lap, and Crusen looked with admiration at her smooth, compact braids. She was a delightfully wholesome creature; he contrasted her mentally with one of his friends who was always ailing and another who had begun to show under her chin the softness still so far ahead of Phebe. One might take a young creature like this and mould her to one's taste. But he was too busy with

a very different enterprise to think of moulding anybody. He stopped the horse and got down and lowered the bars in a gateway, raising them again when Phebe had driven through.

"We're going to the South Mountain Iron Company's mine," he said. "You won't see very much, however."

"Why, this was once a good road!" said Phebe.

"It had to be for the heavy wagons," explained Crusen. "The ore from the South Mountain mine, and also the Weidner mine was hauled out this way."

"But you go to the Weidner mine by quite a different road," said Phebe. "You passed it just before you caught up with me."

"That's the old entrance to the house," explained Crusen. "This is the entrance to the mine."

"I heard this afternoon that George Weidner is dead," said Phebe.

"Yes," said Crusen. "He's been dead for several years."

"Do you know Ambrose?" asked Phebe "When you left me at Reading so many years ago, I saw him on the platform and I thought you went to speak to him."

"I used to lend him books," answered Crusen. "How many years did you say it was since I left you at Reading?"

"More than two," said Phebe.

Crusen stopped the horse in an open space on the hillside. The trees had been cut away and the clearing had been tramped and the ground overlaid with refuse from the fires of the old engine-house so that there was no vegetation. There remained the ruins of a few wooden buildings and some rusting machinery.

"There's the entrance to the South Mountain shaft," said Crusen.

"Can you go in?" asked Phebe.

"Yes, but it's not very safe. The timbers have rotted away and it's damp, and of course entirely black."

"Is the ore all out?"

"Pretty much."

"Does the vein go straight in?"

"No, it turns and goes downward."

"Did they go to the bottom?"

"No, the bottom is on Weidner's land." Crusen gathered up the reins and continued their slow progress.

Suddenly Phebe laughed. It was not like Phebe to be spiteful, but she was spiteful now.

"Poor Ambrose came to church in the most dreadful clothes, and he cut his own hair. If you spoke to him, he grinned and answered with queer long words. He was so awkward he stumbled over his own feet. He used to speak in Christian Endeavor meeting and my cousin and I didn't dare to look at each other."

"Here's the Weidner mine," said Crusen.

"Why, what is going on?" asked Phebe in amazement.

The plant was larger and less ruinous than the South Mountain mine and there were many signs of activity. Stakes dotted the ground, the clearing of undergrowth had begun, a new road was being built, and repairs were being made on a long row of dilapidated tenements.

"A company is going to open it up," explained Crusen. "A new process by which the iron can be separated magnetically is to be tried here, I understand."

A man came out from the doorway of the ruined office and looked at them suspiciously.

"He doesn't seem very glad to see us," said Phebe.

"Probably they don't want strangers prowling round," Crusen's voice vibrated, but one could not say whether he was annoyed at the attitude of the care-taker or thrilled by

the thought of a new process. He stared round coolly and drove on.

"Are we going to pass the Weidner house?" Phebe shivered delightfully as the woods thickened. "I've always wanted to see it."

"I understand that the new road passes near by. When the mine was first opened, there was no railroad station nearer than Millerstown. Now there's a station a mile beyond at Red Hill, so the ore will go out this way on a siding."

"Does Ambrose own the mine?" asked Phebe, thinking of drunken Weidner and dreadful Ilka. Vinnie said that Ilka and her baby were "put away" — did she mean in the almshouse?

"I suppose so, nominally," answered Crusen. "But it can't be a profitable possession."

"Won't it be now?"

"My child" — Crusen spoke with a queer positiveness — "this company will put more money into one machine than Ambrose could sell this whole place for — and himself into the bargain. They're coming up here to make experiments, not money. If the process is successful, the money will be made elsewhere, on deeper, richer veins."

"There it is!" said Phebe, leaning forward.

The house seemed to rise magically, a large square stone building. In the semi-twilight of the woods it had a sinister appearance. From morning till night the sun did not shine full upon it, but struck it only occasionally with a glancing shaft. Such a shaft now reddened it brilliantly.

"It's like the house of Usher!"

"You would have thought so if you had come here one night as I did," said Crusen. "I got lost like an idiot and stayed in the old office through a tremendous thunderstorm; then I

came here through the dripping woods and pounded at the door and Ambrose guided me up to the road."

"Will anybody live here?"

"I suppose so, if they get things started."

Crusen chirruped to the horse, and they came in a moment out between sunny fields.

"I had business in Millerstown to-day," he explained, as though he were anxious that Phebe should not assign any importance to this excursion.

"I'm glad you did," said Phebe.

"What do you do all day?" Crusen leaned back and let the horse take his own way; he seemed to have forgotten all about the mine and to be thinking only of his companion. He crossed one knee over the other and turned and laid his arm on the back of the seat so that he could watch Phebe.

"In the forenoon I look after the babies, and in the afternoon I help Vinnie Most to make dresses with which to dazzle Granger College. In the evening we sometimes go motoring. Vinnie is very interesting. She knows hundreds of stories." She repeated the stories about Horace Berger and Nicholas Ainey and Mrs. Abner Hartline, and she told them quite as well as Vinnie.

"Tell me another," said Crusen, highly entertained.

Phebe frowned, staring at the dashboard. The opportunity to shine was wholly unexpected, but she was equal to it. She gave a little laugh and began another of Vinnie's stories, but she told this differently. She observed Millerstown from without, and she had eyes for all the humor which Vinnie saw and a great deal which Vinnie missed. She invented conversations in the vernacular, deepening and rounding her voice until it sounded like Aunt Cassie's.

"Another," said Crusen.

Phebe uttered again her gay little laugh. "I could keep on for hours."

"You have dramatic talent."

"Have I?" laughed Phebe. "You're the first to recognize it."

"One more." Crusen let the horse crop grass at the side of the road. As Phebe finished, he pulled out his watch.

"It's quarter after seven, and I'm going to take the eight o'clock train! Will your family be anxious?"

"Oh, no! They think I'm at Vinnie's and Vinnie thinks I'm with them." She felt the familiar burning in her eyes. He was going; in a few moments they would see Millerstown and he would be gone. "I could stay two more hours and nobody would worry."

Crusen's eyes narrowed.

"Not many young women of your age are so free."

"I'm entirely free," declared Phebe. "But I don't know that it does me much good." Her sadness deepened. This lovely afternoon was past forever; they were driving down the hill toward the church and Millerstown lay just beyond. "There inside that fence is where I shall be buried," she said.

"Nonsense!" Crusen shifted the lines to his right hand and laid his left on hers. He thought again of the pleasure of moulding a young creature to be one's companion and confidante. But such companionship was impossible. His plans for the future he could tell no one. As for the past — the difference between himself and the child beside him made his heart stand still. He took his hand away and laughed — no less at his moment of sentiment than at his moment of regret.

"What amuses you?" asked Phebe thickly. When his hand was gone, she realized that she might have turned her palm slowly against it.

"I was laughing at the absurd idea of your being buried," said Crusen.

Phebe turned her head quickly.

"Your voice is excited," she said. "You look as though you were expecting some extraordinary good fortune, as though something you had dreamed of were coming true."

"You are clairvoyant," answered Crusen, as if against his will.

"Will it come true soon?"

"Possibly," said Crusen.

At Heimbach's gate he sprang down and helped her out.

"You won't forget New York," he said, shaking hands with her quickly.

"No," said Phebe. She opened the gate and stepped up on the porch. He had already driven across the street and the hostler from the hotel was taking his horse. In an instant, without a backward glance, he vanished indoors.

"No," said Phebe to herself, "I won't forget."

She began suddenly to long intensely for money. Money could give one liberty to do as one chose.

She lifted the latch of the screen door; then she knew that it was impossible to go in until Crusen left. She could not speak to Beulah or eat her supper as long as there was a chance of seeing him again.

In a few minutes Crusen went briskly down the street, and she watched him with gloating eyes until he passed out of sight. As he vanished, Beulah called from upstairs, "Is that you, Phebe?"

"Yes," answered Phebe, trembling.

"I thought Vinnie might not have such a hearty supper, so I left pie and cake for you and coffee on the stove."

Phebe folded her arms as though she embraced her happy, amused self.

"Beulah," she called up into the darkness, "you are a peach."

VI

William Neuweiler drove his car out the garage door and up the street. It was a five-passenger of the same make as his wedding present to Beulah. William was a creature of intense loyalties; he would no more abandon a good make of car than he would abandon a good wife.

Phebe came out of the house with the rest of William's passengers and, having helped Beulah and one baby and Aunt Rosie and the other into the rear seat, she climbed in by William, thankful that she could sit where she would not need to talk. She did not care to ride; she preferred to stay at home in order to receive the evening mail promptly. Her existence was centered in the post-office and she awaited longingly three letters.

The one most ardently desired was Crusen's. In early June she had sent him an invitation to Granger's single festivity, the Class Day exercises, but it was now August and he had not answered. She knew that a proud girl would not call herself to his attention, but it was hard for Phebe to be proud when she was in love. Perhaps he would do better than write, he might seek her out in Millerstown. The mining operations on the mountain were progressing, and a small village was growing up round the station at Red Hill — might he not come again to observe them? She saw herself driving with him in the deep shade behind the blessedly slow horse.

The second letter which she hoped for was from Stannard, from whom she had not heard for six months. She had not been able to pay the last of her fees at the college and the debt shamed her. If she did not receive a remittance soon, she must borrow from Heimbach, a necessity which she wished to avoid as long as possible. Heimbach's earnings were small and the scale of living in Millerstown different from that of

the world, and the sum she needed would seem tremendous. But if Uncle said, "Phebe, there is no mail for you," she would have to answer, "Will you lend me some money?"

She had dreamed of following Crusen's suggestion and going to Columbia, but that was now impossible. She had waited a dangerously long time to secure employment, and the third letter for which she looked was from an agency to which she had applied long after all her class had secured positions. The thought of teaching made her shudder; she remembered Miss McGrath whose charm was spoiled, Miss Underhill who vainly pursued youth, Miss Crane who had long ago acknowledged herself beaten, Dean Preston whose physical defects were each day becoming more pronounced, old, old Miss Catterson who had taught at Granger since the opening day, and she saw her end in theirs. But to teach she would be compelled.

She had many foreign postcards from Gertrude, who in spite of friendly warnings was escorting a party of women to Italy, Switzerland, France, Holland, Belgium, and England, the excursion, including the journey on slow steamers, to last ten weeks. Her cards bore only exclamations such as "Marvelous!" "Beyond words!" "Sublime!" "Party ignorant, dull, blind, deaf!" — and one startling "Aren't these carved saints wonderful? Women fighting like cats!"

William drove expertly; he took no risks, neither did he creep. He knew that Millerstown was looking at his new car, but he knew also that on the rear seat were three precious creatures. He drove out the pike, past the church and up the hill, looking from side to side, and estimating the crops of fruit in the orchards and of corn in the fields.

"I sold those red gates," he said to Phebe; or, "I have the agency for that windmill."

On the rear seat the passengers sat in a pleasant dream.

Beulah had almost all whom she loved close beside her. She had thought Phebe silent when she first came home, but now she was a little livelier. The mental effort which Phebe had put forth during her schooling would account for her exhaustion. Aunt Rosie was as happy as Beulah. She had lived all her life in the small hamlet of East Mexico, and now she traveled over the county and out of it in luxury.

The country into which they sped was even richer than that about Millerstown. There were wider, deeper streams and the meadows were greener. William showed Phebe a stock farm where a calf had been sold for ten thousand dollars and they commented upon the fine barns and the large churches. In East Mexico William pretended that he was going to stop.

"I thought you wanted to get out at your place, Aunt Rosie."

"All I want of my place is the rent," said Aunt Rosie.

"Yes, well," said William, sailing on.

The sun sank and the woodland grew shadowy. They had made a wide circuit, climbing steadily during the last half-hour, and their way back to Millerstown was the lonely mountain road. Phebe leaned forward — here she had turned into the woods with Crusen! She laid her hand against her aching heart.

At the curb, in his evening costume of clean soft-collared blue shirt and worn vest and trousers, Uncle Heimbach waited. He smiled and his black beard quivered. He took the elder of his sleepy grandsons in his arm and Aunt Rosie helped Beulah down.

"Here is a letter, Phebe," he said cheerfully.

Phebe went in, and with tremulous hands pressed the button which turned on the electric light in the sitting-room and illuminated a shade on which were moulded grapes and peaches and apples and wistaria blossoms. But the letter came from

Miss Preston, and was doubtless a reminder of unpaid fees.

She was tempted not to open it, but she tore off the end with a motion of weariness and distaste, and bent above it frowning. There was no mention of her debt; instead Miss Preston offered her a position. Miss Catterson, the head of the English department, had resigned, and Miss Birely had been advanced, leaving her instructorship vacant. This instructorship Miss Preston hoped Phebe would accept.

Phebe heard the slam of the screen door; Beulah was coming in to put the babies to bed. She went through the kitchen to the rear porch and sat down alone. To teach at Granger! What a dreadful fate!

Heimbach came presently in search of her and sat down stiffly.

"Phebe," said he, "you know if you don't hear from your Pop regular, I can let you have money — say fifty dollars."

Phebe caught her breath — it was a hundred and fifty which she needed. But if she went back to Granger, she could pay her debt gradually.

"I've been asked to teach at Granger College, Uncle."

"No!" exclaimed Uncle in awe.

"My salary will begin in September, but I should have fifty dollars to get some things and pay my traveling expenses."

"Sure," said Uncle, "I'll make it sixty."

"Thank you," said Phebe faintly.

VII

PHEBE stepped from the train into the arms of Gertrude Dennis.

"I thought you'd come this afternoon!" said Gertrude joyfully. "I landed yesterday, shook my thirteen females, saw my aunts, and came on this morning. I jumped for joy when I heard you were going to be here; it's the sugar on my

cereal. Where's your trunk check? There's going to be a Faculty meeting right after supper."

"Am I expected at a Faculty meeting?"

"This is a general one — even I get in."

Gertrude would not let go her arm; holding her tightly she steered her to the waiting car. At her Phebe stared.

"Did you ever see anything like my purple face? Oh, Phebe, those women! — those harpies! I always start out by protecting it from the sun, then I get tired of veils and pomades. To-morrow it will begin to peel, and I'll look like the old Scratch. When did the Dean offer you a position?"

"A few weeks ago. Miss Catterson has resigned."

"Miss Catterson is dead," supplemented Gertrude. "Miss Preston told me. She died suddenly. We'll have a memorial-service. She taught here thirty-eight years. You look frightened, Phebe."

"I am," confessed Phebe. "Do you suppose we'll be here thirty-eight years?"

"Not I!" said Gertrude. "Not thirty-eight months. Not thirty-eight days if I could help it. I'd rather conduct parties, hard work as that is. Not one would help with her luggage, and not one knew anything. They were beasts."

The car climbed the winding drive and they rose above the little town hidden by thick trees in their last summer greenness. Another passage through the woods and they saw a part of the broad plain. Phebe's heart leaped — the place was beautiful, though it seemed like a prison.

"I could have tied them in a bunch and dropped them overboard," said Gertrude. "Old maids and widows with no idea of what they were going for, no appreciation of what they saw, no enthusiasm for anything but writing postcards. I was their courier, their guide, their slave. But I saw Paestum — alone; they were afraid of the sun, they sat in

the railroad station and groaned. And I saw St. Peter's and Venice and Lake Maggiore. I have a thousand things to tell you. And I met the most wonderful girl — in the Louvre — a marvelous creature."

"Let's walk this evening until study bell," Phebe suggested.

"There won't be any study bell," reminded Gertrude. "But there's that meeting. You know you don't need to pay any attention to the study bell except when you have to be proctor. You and I are to have the rooms over the front door. We can see the whole world."

In the office twenty chairs had been ranged round the wall and there was a vase of asters on Miss Preston's desk. She stood inside the door shaking hands heartily with each arrival. Her enthusiasm was not pretended — Granger College was her life; here she had spent her happiest hours, here she expected to remain until, like Miss Catterson, she should lay her burden down. She was happy because school was opening and she believed that the year would be unusually smooth and successful. The departure of Miss Catterson removed certain obstacles. Miss Birely would introduce new methods, and Phebe Stannard would, Miss Preston hoped, be an efficient assistant. Miss Preston believed that Phebe was being disciplined by life and that her experience would improve her. She had at times the arrogant airs of a princess, but one could not be arrogant when one was in debt.

When all were assembled, Miss Preston made an address of welcome. She was at her best in a new gown and the teachers were travel-stained and tired. The chairs were high and many of the women were short, and they appeared awkward in whatever position they assumed. They looked astonished and many of them somewhat doubtfully at Phebe.

Gertrude crossed one knee over the other, and tried to reach the floor with her toe, whispering meanwhile to Phebe,

"Twenty froggies went to school,
Down beside a running pool."

"Hush!" said Phebe.

Dean Preston led in prayer, making an allusion to the "death of our sister" which puzzled many, but before she concluded, Miss Catterson had been fixed upon as the subject of her allusion.

The routine business was short, and there remained only brief announcements of a few changes in the schedule, of the promotion of Miss Birely and of the appointment of Miss Stannard to the position of Assistant in English. When the meeting closed, Miss Preston asked Phebe to stay, and the others went promptly to their unpacking or their rest. They went in couples, restoring old groupings. Phebe watched them go. Herself and these!

Dean Preston bade her sit down.

"I have very different things to say to you from those I said during my first interview, Miss Stannard. We rarely ask a graduate to teach here before she has gained experience in a lower school, but I have made an exception in your case. Your work will be outlined for you by Miss Birely. In addition, you will have hours for proctoring and you will be expected one Sunday evening each month to accompany students to town to church."

"Yes," said Phebe.

"You have ample dignity for your position. If any criticism is to be made, it is that you lack, perhaps, a sufficiently friendly attitude. These young girls yearn for sympathy."

"Yes," said Phebe, blushing.

Miss Preston took a folded paper from a pigeon-hole of her desk.

"Your salary will be sixty dollars a month in addition to your living. What method do you prefer for liquidating your

debt? Shall we withhold a part, say twenty dollars, for five months?"

"I think that would be a good plan."

Miss Preston unfolded her paper.

"It is customary for us to have a two-year contract with our teachers. This is where you sign."

Phebe read the printed document. At the bottom was written in Miss Preston's hand the provision about her debt. She wrote her name, "Phebe Stannard." Two years was a long time, but Fate had her.

Miss Preston laid the document back in the pigeon-hole and took out a smaller paper. It had a familiar shape and size.

"I'm sorry that a letter which you posted before you left in the spring got no farther than the mail-box. It caught in the lid and remained there until to-day."

Phebe held out a trembling hand. The letter was her invitation to Alexander Crusen.

"Your name, you see, is on the flap. I hope it was not very important."

A sort of blight passed over Phebe's face, but in an instant the color rushed back.

"No," she managed to say lightly. "It wasn't important."

Suddenly Miss Preston yearned for Phebe's friendship and confidence. She laid her thin hand on Phebe's.

"I hope you're going to be happy."

Phebe rose, withdrawing her hand.

"Thank you," she said with careful politeness. "You are very kind, Miss Preston."

She went down the hall and up the stairway to the rooms which had been assigned to her and Gertrude. They were pretty rooms with fresh paper and paint and Gertrude had already established order. Phebe opened the door and, real-

izing thankfully that she was alone, passed into her bedroom and sat down by the window. Her letter had never gone! Crusen had not heard from her! He might after all have attended Commencement; he might have come to Millerstown and they might have wandered the woodland paths together. He might have put his arm round her and held her close. It would have seemed like the end of a journey, long and hard, but over at last. But he had not had her letter! The accident was harder to bear than the indifference of Hersh and Todd. She was older, her disappointment was deeper and sharper. Presently the moon riding high in its second quarter shone in as if bidding her behold the majestic scene and be comforted. But she was not comforted; nothing could heal her hurt or satisfy her desire.

Gertrude came down the hall whistling, and, entering the sitting-room, switched on the light.

"Are you there?"

"Yes," answered Phebe.

"As soon as we can save enough money, we'll go to New York."

"I don't expect to have any money."

"You need only car fare. We'll stay with the aunts."

Phebe rested her chin on her clasped hands. She turned her head, her hands still supporting it, and looked out again at the dimly lighted plain.

"When do you think of going?"

"Soon. We'll get off if we watch our chance."

The envelope lay in Phebe's lap. She looked down at it and read in imagination.

Mr. Alexander Crusen,
Fifth Avenue and 54th Street,
Opposite the University Club,
New York.

She turned again and looked at the moon and smiled. The smile was not like the smiles of her youth, it was a little twisted and a little sad, and at once better and worse than the expression of despair which it replaced. She heard Gertrude talking, but she only half comprehended what she said.

"I met her in the Louvre. I had got to the point where I couldn't stand my menagerie, so I turned 'em loose in the Bon Marché with an interpreter. I was so sorry for him that I paid him double. I was supposed to have business elsewhere. I had — with my own soul. She stood looking at the Rembrandts, and I asked her a question. I think she wanted to get the Dutch school straight in her own mind and she took me by the arm and led me round. She had a low voice and blue eyes. I was dazzled — completely dazzled. I hardly thanked her and I didn't ask her name."

"Was she American?" asked Phebe idly.

"Of course," said Gertrude. "She had American sense and smartness and friendliness — you couldn't mistake her. When I get out of this hole, I'll find her."

PART IV

PART IV

I

GERTRUDE rose and turned on the electric light and the coffee percolator and went into Phebe's room and slammed down the window, and then pinched Phebe's cheek. Her blinking eyes twinkled with sleep and excitement.

"Wake up! It's half-past four."

"Is it?" Phebe sprang from bed and put on her slippers and went, still only half awake and shivering in the cold February morning, to her bureau where she began to unbraid her thick hair. She was going with Gertrude to New York for a holiday which she owed to the misfortune of another. Mrs. Bland had died, and Phebe had instructed the younger pupils during the two weeks of Bland's absence and when Bland returned, Gertrude advised Phebe to ask permission to be away. Phebe had become an efficient teacher, perhaps the most efficient in the college. She enjoyed preparing her material and especially arranging it systematically in her own mind, though she disliked the act of instruction with its wearisome repetitions. Her gravity, her unconcealed contempt for those who would not work, and her avoidance of personal relations might have combined to produce failure, but while she was feared she was obeyed and even adored. It was doubtful whether any teacher in Granger suffered more from the languishing eyes of students.

"You've done Miss Preston a favor and she'll certainly let you off," urged Gertrude. "It will be only for two days — we'll be back on Sunday evening."

"I haven't any money," complained Phebe ruefully.

"You surely have car fare and five dollars for I. Tolstoi!"

"Perhaps I won't give him five dollars." I. Tolstoi was still somewhat mythical, but Phebe decided that he was a man.

"You'll more likely mortgage your whole year's salary."

Phebe put in the last hairpin and adjusted a net deftly, yet with trembling hands. She was going to New York, and New York meant Crusen. She would telephone him at once; she had thought it all out, night after night, her smooth cheek on her hand, her mouth smiling, her lids drooping over sleepy eyes. He might not understand at first, and then he would protest that it could not be she, and she would say, "But it is!"

Looking up from her shoes and stockings, she met Gertrude's intent gaze.

"To-day I live," declared Gertrude solemnly.

Dawn was two hours away when they proceeded down the hillside path.

"Granger College — students, buildings, everything — and all this mountain are rolling off my back," said Gertrude.

Phebe defined her emotions to herself. "I haven't been so light-hearted for months." She could have specified the day when she had last been really happy, the day of her drive with Crusen, a year and a half ago.

"You can have a nap before we get to Jersey City," promised Gertrude. "That is, if you can sleep."

To her surprise, Phebe promptly made herself comfortable and closed her eyes. How could any one sleep on the way to New York? But she saw Phebe's eyeballs move under her closed lids.

"She knows only villages and boarding-schools," said Gertrude to herself. "New York will wake her up."

At Jersey City Gertrude was the first passenger out of the train. She sped through the station to the upper level and across the gangplank, smiling at a deckhand as she flew. He grinned and touched his cap.

"Does he know you?" asked Phebe, amazed.

"He recognizes me for a lunatic," explained Gertrude, hastening to the bow. "This ride makes me nearly die for joy. There it is, Phebe! See it!"

The color deepened in Phebe's cheeks, and for the moment she forgot Crusen. Neither eyes nor mind could take in at once the crowding impressions, the soft gray green of the water, the misty distance where one looked out to sea, the screaming, darting tugs, the fluttering pennants, the long streamers of white smoke, the gulls flashing silver white, the sunshine glittering now on their wings, now only on their bodies so that they looked like glistening missiles swiftly hurled.

Gertrude took her by the arm and turned her round.

"There's the old lady — doesn't she look fat?" She gave Phebe another turn. "There's the Battery. Washington walked up and down the sea wall — Burr, too."

"Is that a liner?" asked Phebe stupidly.

"A liner! My child! That's a small freighter." Gertrude laughed happily; she wanted Phebe to be startled out of her wits. "Now we're turning in."

"We're going into the buildings!" cried Phebe.

"No, we're not. But look at them!" She began to call the vast structures by name as though they were loved human beings or a kennel of great mastiffs. "Woolworth! Singer!"

"They come when you call," said Phebe. She was suddenly intensely happy; the world seemed to be made for her pleasure. "I never thought it would be like this."

"No," said Gertrude. "Of course you didn't."

The ferry entered the slip and Gertrude flew across a bridge and down into a narrow street. For one moment Phebe believed herself abandoned, then she saw Gertrude at the Subway entrance beckoning.

"You'll have to get up speed! What will you do in a crowd?"

"Isn't this a crowd?"

"A crowd! Heavens!" Gertrude plunged to a waiting train. "There, sit down." When she guided Phebe out into the daylight, she took the handbag from her and kept hold of her arm. "This way. This is Eighth Street." She began to quote poetry. She quoted at intervals all day and all the next day.

"Had I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,
The house for me, no doubt, were the house in the city-square;
Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window there!"

Phebe smiled. "Do you know it all?"

"Every word. Didn't consciously memorize it either. Now here" — She stopped short and Phebe, trying to check her swift pace, slid a few steps ahead. They had come out on a broad street on which green omnibuses passed back and forth. "Here you are! The most marvelous street in the world!"

"Fifth Avenue?" faltered Phebe, afraid of a mistake.

"You have it!" Gertrude spun Phebe round. "Washington Square and the Washington Arch. Come on. We live in the Square." She chanted a catalogue of famous names, Poe, James, Curtis, Roosevelt. "All lived somewhere round here or were born here." She turned toward the west, passed five or six houses, opened a low gate, and ran up the steps of a tall brownstone house with iron balconies

at its drawing-room windows. "Here we are! Greenwich Village lies over there." She found a key in her purse and waved it. "I carry this with me always."

"I'll find the keyhole for you," offered Phebe.

"It's found!" laughed Gertrude.

Opening the door, she ushered Phebe in. The ceilings of the old house were as high as the lofty ceiling of the Granger College drawing-room, the woodwork was walnut, the carpets were dark velvet, and everywhere against the dark paper hung dark engravings. There was an odor of long habitation, a faint smell of drains, and a heartening aroma of coffee and breakfast bacon. Gertrude whistled briskly the opening bars of the Fifth Symphony. At once a hum of voices fell silent, and she called out, "Keep your places! Come on, Phebe!" — and hurried down the hall into a long dining-room where a dozen men and women sat motionless with surprise.

"This is my friend, Phebe Stannard," she announced. "We left Granger at five-thirty. Phebe, at the head of the table is Aunt Margaret; at the foot is Aunt Mary, her assistant. Will the other aunts please raise their hands? Aunt Irene yonder" — Gertrude pointed — "Aunt Flora there, Aunt Elizabeth here. The rest you'll become acquainted with in due time. The gentleman who leaps to give you a place is Mr. Valentine Levering."

Margaret lifted her cheek for Gertrude's kiss and held out her hand to Phebe. Tall and thin and bright-eyed, she was distinguished by a towering pompadour and by the scar of a burn on her cheek, received while rescuing a maid from a carelessly lit fire. Though she was the housekeeper, she had no air of domesticity, but, dressed in an old-fashioned, elaborately braided black dress, presided with the air of a queen.

From Margaret, Gertrude proceeded to Irene, who, like her sisters, kept flesh away from her body as she helped to keep the wolf from the door. In the office of her publishing house, Irene was known as "the Encyclopædia." She had been an employee since the organization of the company, and it was believed that she could carry on even the work of the president in an emergency. She wore a dark blue dress with ruching in neck and sleeves. Not only her little face, but her whole meager body seemed to shrink behind her thick-rimmed spectacles. Gertrude resembled her as a rushing locomotive might resemble a stationary engine.

Flora was like Irene, except that she showed the effect of being constantly in a position of importance at the Information Desk in the General Reading Room of the Public Library, where she furnished the ignorant with advice and the wise with more information than they already had. Her head was tilted back as though to show she despised ignorance, especially ignorance of books. She, too, wore ruching, but, being a little younger than Irene, she left visible a thin little neck.

Elizabeth did not rise to greet Phebe — she occupied a chair different from the others, with a high back and wheels. She bore no resemblance whatever to her family, and while much had been taken from her something had been given her which they lacked — extraordinary beauty of face and expression. She had regular, delicately modeled features, wide dark eyes, a complexion in which a faint rose still lingered, and thick, lightly curling gray hair which had changed its color without losing its vitality. Propelled to her place of business by Mary, she sat all day mending books; not ordinary books, but ancient, precious volumes, resurrected from attics, or bought from rag-men, a single grain of wheat in a mass of worthless stuff.

Mary, who was like Margaret, but a little less elegant, was on her feet, making place for the newcomers.

"Only coffee and toast for us," said Gertrude. "Then we're off till dinner time."

Of the boarders only Valentine Levering lingered. His offer to serve the newcomers being laughingly declined, he sat for a moment by Phebe, watching her admiringly, his own poetic face being meanwhile well worth looking at. It was difficult to say whether he was somewhat weak in character or whether he was merely unworldly. An acquaintance with his dramatic compositions would have made the latter alternative untenable.

"Of course this isn't your first visit to New York."

Phebe thought his black eyes a little too soft and dark.

"Yes, it is."

"Have you made plans for this evening?"

"Not a plan," answered Gertrude. "Not that we can't find anything to do."

"Come with me to the theater," invited Valentine. "You and Miss Stannard."

The blood rushed from Phebe's heart to her face — she could not give this evening to a stranger. Crusen might be at this moment close by. When Gertrude answered, she caught her breath in a gasp of relief.

"We'll let you know at dinner time."

"It isn't as though he paid for the tickets," Gertrude explained when he had gone. "He writes plays and has the run of an experimental theater. It might interest you to see it."

They left the house at quarter to nine, and with them as far as the corner went four Dennises, Elizabeth being propelled by Mary. In their street clothes Irene and Flora looked exactly alike; both wore black coats and black hats

of identical shape and each had a little neckpiece fashioned from the sealskin of a more affluent day. The other aunts had similar pieces and so had Gertrude. Flora urged Phebe to visit her at the Public Library, and Irene invited her to the office of Bacon and Bascom. They spoke with maidenly accuracy, halting a little while they sought the right word.

Gertrude could not walk sedately, nor keep her tongue quiet. She went on with her quotation while her aunts smiled.

". . . the city, oh, the city — the square with the houses! Why?
They are stone-faced, white as a curd, there's something to take
the eye!
Houses in four straight lines, not a single front awry."

When they separated at the corner, Phebe was relieved; she could not bear to look upon Elizabeth in her ruin of youth and loveliness. Miss McGrath, Miss Preston, Miss Underhill — their situations were all tragic, but none of them had had to see great beauty ineffective.

"Now up you go," said Gertrude, pointing to a bus.

"To the top?"

"Sure."

Phebe scrambled up, her cheeks glowing. The sun shone brightly, the avenue stretched endlessly, Gertrude talked unceasingly; again famous names flowed from her lips in a steady stream. Here was the old Brevoort. Here was Mark Twain's house — she had seen him often standing on the steps, cigarette in hand. He was a great old boy, Gertrude said, but a little overrated. Here General Sickles had lived, and in this church was La Farge's great painting. Here was Madison Square. White, Saint-Gaudens, Tiffany, Farragut, Arthur, Conkling, Seward — she showed proudly their works or their statues — "and Miss Flora MacFlimsy," she concluded.

"And Brentano's," she said in a few moments, and Phebe repeated, "Brentano's!" and gazed with round eyes.

Gertrude pointed out store after store, church after church, extending her explanations to the east and west, indicating residence sections and parks once famous and long since abandoned to business or to foreigners. She had, she explained, a destination, but she would not say what it was.

"There's the Public Library; we'll stop as we come down."

She pointed to the most elegant of the cars, the most sumptuously dressed women, and bade Phebe wait until afternoon to be amazed. Here was St. Patrick's Cathedral, here St. Thomas's Church — she spoke of reredos and organs, of carved stalls and groined roofs. Presently she waved her hand and said "University Club."

Phebe's heart almost leaped from her body.

"Beautiful mural decorations," Gertrude went on. "But they won't let anybody in."

Phebe stared this way and that. Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Fourth Street opposite the University Club! If she might only stop! But the bus rumbled on, and Gertrude proceeded with her catalogue. Central Park — she dismissed it with a flourish. The Hudson River — she spoke as though it were her property.

"I do own it," she said. "All these mansions and the river and the warships and the statues — everything. It's mine — yours, too."

Presently she bade Phebe descend.

"Close your eyes," she ordered solemnly, taking Phebe's arm.

"I can't very well do that."

"Well, see as little as you can. This is to be an epoch in your life. Across here, please, and up these steps. Now look about you! Aren't you astounded?"

Phebe saw a large domed building and a bewildering array of what seemed to be recitation halls and dormitories.

"What is it?"

"Columbia University," announced Gertrude. "Teachers College. Barnard yonder. Promise me you'll come here to study."

"I will if I can."

"That's all I want," said Gertrude. "Now we haven't time to stop longer."

At one o'clock Gertrude led the way into the Public Library. She walked briskly and looked excited and not in the least weary, though she had shown Phebe the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and had thrust her into the Metropolitan Museum for a fleeting glance.

"I have an appointment which will take half an hour. Can you look round alone?"

"Yes," said Phebe, her eyes searching the lobby for a telephone.

"Isn't this a wonderful place?"

"Yes," she assented impatiently.

"I'll be here at half-past one, then we'll have lunch."

With fumbling hands Phebe sought through the mammoth telephone book for the letter C. But there were no Crusens in New York! She stared at the page aghast. But she was in the suburban section! She turned the pages again — they felt heavy. She found "Crusen, Alexander," and his street and telephone numbers. A smooth voice explained that Mr. Crusen was out of the city — did she wish to leave a message?

"No," said Phebe, trembling.

She hung up the receiver, disappointed but not at first wholly unhappy, having spoken his name and having heard his name spoken. She laid her hand on the receiver — should she leave a message? But then she would not feel easy to

call a second time and perhaps by this evening or to-morrow he would have come back.

Now she would have to look about to satisfy Gertrude. She found Flora Dennis at her desk and listened to her rhapsodies over the library, its size, its conveniences, its valuable collections. In spite of her hungry stomach and her aching heart, she was amazed at the vast reading-room with every seat occupied.

Gertrude, belated and preoccupied with her own affairs, did not ask for her impressions, but hurried her down Fifth Avenue for half a dozen squares and into a restaurant to which access was had by a passageway between two low shops, a dark, crowded place with black woodwork. Sitting in a compartment like a stall and waiting for their order to be filled, Phebe saw a beamed ceiling and other stalls like their own. Over her head, against the wall was a name in handsome brass letters, "Sysonby" and near by "Colin."

"Why, this is a stable!"

"It was," said Gertrude, proudly tapping with her knuckles on the partition. "The Astor stable. All hardwood."

As they ate, Phebe's spirits rose. Inwardly she hearkened to the smooth voice which had pronounced the magic word Crusen. The voice was not unlike Crusen's own.

"Now for I. Tolstoi!" said Gertrude as they stepped out into the sunshine. The afternoon parade was at its climax; interminably in both directions stretched the procession of wealth and poverty, pride and lowliness, happiness and discontent.

"We'll walk," said Gertrude, taking Phebe's arm.

Phebe's arm was limp. She said to herself that she did not care for I. Tolstoi; she had heard too much of him. Oblivious to her indifference, Gertrude led her to shop windows, pointing to gorgeous fabrics, to spring hats, to magnificent

jewelry. She halted her before the Farragut statue and led her round the east side of Madison Square and into Fourth Avenue. Phebe could not pretend that she was not awed — the city was incredible.

They came at last into a region of lower buildings, and Gertrude cried, "We're drawing near!" Phebe lagged behind, irritated by this inexhaustible energy and cheerfulness.

"We're here!" said Gertrude, stopping short.

Phebe could not help a sudden throb of the heart at sight of tables of books on the pavement. A girl came through the passageway between them, glanced for an instant at the display, and passed on. She was slender and short and muffled in furs. Gertrude stared.

"I've seen her before," she declared. "But I can't tell where. No Granger alumna would be roaming in this Elysium! Well, looking at her back won't help me. Come on, Phebe — Paradise at last!"

II

At first glance Tolstoi's store looked like a great, ill-cared-for library. It was narrow but enormously long, and to the ceiling on every side ran bookshelves, the upper two thirds of which were far above the reach of the tallest man. Across the rear half, leaving only narrow passages at the sides, were built parallel tiers of shelves. In the front were long tables heaped with books, on which Phebe saw placards, "Anything on this table 25¢"; "Anything on this table 10¢"; and realized that she was in a shop.

Gertrude proceeded rapidly between the mounds of books toward a space in front of the first lateral bookcase where there were to be seen a heaped-up desk, the indescribable complications of a henna-colored coiffure, and the beautiful head of a middle-aged man. Phebe, following, saw that the

henna-stained hair belonged to a stenographer whose clothes were as elaborate as her coiffure, and the beautiful head to a man sitting, like Elizabeth, in a wheeled chair. The man gave Gertrude a twinkling smile, lifted his hand as if to say, "Wait just a minute!" and proceeded with his dictation, speaking in a rich voice with a foreign accent. Never in her circumscribed life had Phebe come into contact with any one who was not American for many generations, but she guessed that this man was a Russian; she did not suspect that he was a Jew.

"Tell him if he will pay the market price, about fifty dollars," he said, "I shall see what I can do. But that he will not pay — he is a skinflint."

The stenographer chewed gum, synchronizing the motions of mastication with those of speech.

"'He is a skinflint,'" she quoted, waiting for the next sentence.

Tolstoi leaned forward. "Going to put that in?"

"That's exactly the words you said," answered the girl pertly.

Tolstoi clapped his hand to the top of his head.

"Curses!" cried he softly.

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Leave," commanded Tolstoi. "Go home. On Monday we will try again. I heard you had come," said he to Gertrude. "Are you here to stay?"

"No — worse luck," answered Gertrude. "I came to see those sets — whether they're fit for young ladies to handle. I'll go upstairs and find them. This is my friend, Miss Stannard. She's brought five dollars, and you do your best for her."

Tolstoi looked at Phebe. From his brown eyes the same pleasant, magnetic, and slightly inquisitive glance had passed

straight into the eyes of hundreds of men and women. Phebe looked back at him in the same fashion, but with her the glance was new. It was the look of simple, interested friendliness which she should have given to Miss McGrath and Miss Preston, but which she could not give any one of the same sex and which she had never before flashed to any one of a different sex.

"We try to make a good impression at first," said Tolstoi. "Afterwards we draw blood."

"You can't draw blood from us," said Gertrude. "Here, Phebe, is the English Lit. alcove."

Phebe was already pulling off her gloves.

"May I take the books down?"

"Surely," said Gertrude as though she were the proprietor.

Phebe stretched her hand toward "Dreamthorp" and found she could not reach it without opening her coat. The edition was illustrated, the frontispiece was an engraving of "Dreamthorp" itself. She turned ruefully from page to page — the book would take half of her five dollars. She looked at the front and saw that it was marked fifty cents.

"Ah!" she said, laying down her handbag, but hugging the book. She tried to reach another book and, finding that her coat impeded her, she took it off and laid it on a chair. When Gertrude returning turned on a light, she started as though she were detected in some unlawful investigation.

"I didn't mean to be gone so long. What have you gathered?"

"Those," said Phebe. "All those. They come to only five dollars!"

"Take more," advised Gertrude.

"I have no more money."

"That doesn't make any difference." Again Gertrude vanished and Phebe could hear her talking with Tolstoi.

Sometimes he laughed and sometimes he repeated his soft expletive.

"Through?" said Gertrude, coming back at last.

"I'm ashamed," said Phebe.

"You needn't be," Gertrude gathered up the pile and presented it to Tolstoi.

"Five for the lot?" she offered.

"Miss Dennis," answered Tolstoi calmly. "Bold men come here and try to cheat me, but none so bold as you. Do you expect me to pay postage as well?"

"Naturally," said Gertrude.

"That's too much," protested Phebe.

Tolstoi bowed. "For so much feeling I would pay postage to California."

"Now we'll go back and get Aunt Elizabeth," said Gertrude. "I'm to take her home."

In the back of the long store there was a workroom lighted by windows opening on a court. It was a neat, pleasant place, with a view of a beautiful church spire against the sky. At a long table sat Elizabeth and another woman, the materials of their craft spread out before them, binding-cloth, transparent paper, glue, library paste, parchment, scissors, and delicate knives. Elizabeth's companion was Miss Moffatt, a creature as different as could be, mouselike in figure, elaborate in dress, affected in speech, with a profound respect for books and but little knowledge of anything but their names and their bindings. She admired all writers and artists and singers, and she told her address, "Macdougal Street, opposite Macdougal Alley," with pride because the stables of Macdougal Alley had been turned into studios. She had also a profound respect for herself and achieved by the most rigorous economy what she thought was a stylish appearance. She greeted the newcomers with a formal bow, removing the

spectacles which she considered disfiguring. She was, Phebe guessed, quite seventy years old.

"You love your work, don't you, Miss Moffatt?" said Gertrude.

"I do," said Miss Moffatt. "These books have entered into my very soul."

Gertrude's blue eyes twinkled. Miss Moffatt was working upon a magnificent set of French classics and beneath her arm lay "Sappho," open before her the pages of "Pierre et Jean."

"Come, Betsey," said Gertrude, lifting down her aunt's hat and coat.

"It's not quite time," objected Elizabeth.

"I told Brother Tolstoi I was going to fetch you away," said Gertrude.

"Is his name Tolstoi?" asked Phebe.

"I've often wondered. I'll find out."

Tolstoi lifted meditative eyes as they approached.

"Did you hear that young woman?" he asked dolefully. "'Dear sir, you are a skinflint'! They are of no use, they have no sense; they think only of their blouses, how to get them as thin as may be and yet hold together. This one complained because the store was cold. 'Cover yourself up,' I said. 'Cover yourself up!' But I must have them. I can speak and think English, but I cannot write it."

"Is your name really Tolstoi?" asked Gertrude.

"What curiosity!"

"Not at all. I've known you for fifteen years and I never asked you until now."

"My name is Boris Alexandrovno Dologhow," said Tolstoi. "Tolstoi took my surname for a very unpleasant character, so I have returned good for evil, attaching his to a respectable man."

"Good business, too, no doubt," said Gertrude. "You'll ship the books on Monday?"

Tolstoi bowed with humorous formality. "Come again if it does ruin me." He spoke to Gertrude and smiled at Phebe. Phebe held the door open for the passage of Elizabeth's chair, and his brow knitted as he watched.

"What do you think of him?" asked Gertrude.

"I never met any one like him."

"Of course not — at Granger. But New York's filled with people just as interesting."

The little procession was halfway up the block when Gertrude abandoned her companions without excuse. She said, "I'll be here in a minute," and dashed back.

"I was certain that I knew that girl," she called as she returned running and seized hold of her aunt's chair. "Certain of it. The most wonderful girl that I met in the Louvre, Aunt Elizabeth. She showed me the Dutch school. I left my imbeciles in the Bon Marché fighting over bargains. Surely you remember my telling you about her, Phebe! You remember I said she was wonderful."

"You said she was marvelous. She had a tongue like an angel and eyes like blue violets and the mind of Samuel Johnson."

"It was all true. She's Ada Haldeman, the secretary of Albertus Rick, the mine-owner and collector. She buys his things for him — Americana are his specialty. Tolstoi knows her well. I'm certain she didn't recognize me any more than I recognized her. But I'll meet her. Are you all right, Betsey? Phebe, yonder is the Cooper Union. You know what the Cooper Union is?"

"I connect it with Lincoln's speech."

"Yes. 'Let us have faith that right makes might,' et cetera. It's said that a boy was directed to take him to his

hotel afterward, but he was ashamed of him and took him to the corner and pointed the way."

The home-going crowd had begun to pour into the street. Gertrude guided the chair with a firm eye and a strong arm.

"You see where we are? Here we came up from the Subway this morning. Here's Fifth Avenue and here's the Arch. We'll rest till dinner. Miss Andrews is a pedigree historian. You'll like her; she has very interesting and humorous experiences. Miss Carter will speak for herself. Miss Vermilye is a writer of advertisements, Mr. Roberts, an interior decorator, and Jerome, a violinist. You'll soon get acquainted with them. Would you like to go to the theater with Valentine?"

"If you go."

Gertrude laughed. "I'm not going. To get Valentine at his full flavor you have to have him alone. You go — you'll be entertained."

At the Dennis's front steps Gertrude brought from the vestibule a wooden framework which made the elevating of Elizabeth's chair easy and, without looking at Elizabeth, Phebe helped to push it up the incline. She noted the position of the telephone in the hall near the dining-room door and she slipped downstairs when Gertrude had gone to speak to her aunts. But Crusen was still "out of the city."

There was apparently no realization of their pathetic condition in the party at the dinner-table. The dresses of the Dennises were elaborate, old-fashioned, and well worn; Miss Carter's was still more elaborate and older. Miss Vermilye and Miss Andrews wore the fresh blouse of the working woman. The dinner was excellent and the voices were low — Phebe did not appreciate the rarity of these blessings in a boarding-house.

As Gertrude promised, Phebe found the gentlemen affable.

Roberts looked the part of a tidy, careful bachelor who fully satisfied his own ideals. His suit of brown wool, belted at his slender waist, his scarf-pin set with a fashionable semi-precious stone, his handsome ring — all appeared new enough to be the sudden acquisition of one who had recently lost all his property in a fire.

Jerome was very different from Roberts, though they had been friends and had lived together for years in the Dennis's upper story, where the billiard-room had been fitted out as a music-room. Jerome, like Roberts, had a fondness for personal possessions, but they were possessions of a different sort, a fine piano, an historic violin, many books, and a few pictures. His music, Gertrude whispered to Phebe, was "the real thing." He was tall and his loose gray suit was far from new. He looked pleasantly at the guests, but said little.

Valentine Levering, resplendent in evening clothes, complained because he had not been put next to Phebe.

"She'll have enough of you this evening," said Miss Andrews and Miss Vermilye together, the shrill soprano of the one and the deep alto of the other forming a vibrant chord. Miss Andrews was short and thin with tiny hands and feet, Miss Vermilye was large and raw-boned, but in good-nature and in affection for each other they were alike. They teased Valentine about some one whom they called Eileen, and he accused them of spoiling his chances with Miss Stannard.

Miss Carter alone took no part in the gay and harmless exchange. She was a large, dark woman with a massive figure and a head held high. It seemed to Phebe that she was waiting for a chance to speak, and finally she seized upon a pause in the conversation.

"Are you related to General Stannard?" she asked.

"No," answered Phebe.

"I am connected with several distinguished military men," announced Miss Carter majestically. "I am also a collateral descendant of George Washington."

When Phebe answered sincerely, "I think you look like him," there was a unanimous bending of heads. Miss Carter did not seem to be aware of this little stir; she applied herself to her dinner and the heads were lifted. Now and then she glanced approvingly at Phebe.

Phebe, too, was gay. When asked about the locality from which she came, she astonished all the gathering with samples of German and Pennsylvania German and what might be called Pennsylvania English. In the midst of her description she remembered her drive with Crusen, and the lively imitations for which she had been complimented. Her aspect changed and her voice faltered; then she collected herself.

Magnificent and sophisticated as Valentine was, he seemed very glad to have Phebe's company. He suggested that they start early in order to have a turn round the block and he took Phebe's arm and matched his step carefully to hers. He bade her look at the white arch and described the wonderful effects of moonlight and falling snow.

"It's the most interesting part of New York; there are many fine old houses and all sorts of delicious little alleys and courts. Over there Henry James was born, and near by Morse worked with his telegraph. Stanford White designed the church yonder and La Farge the windows. Are you interested in pictures and statues and stained-glass windows?"

"Yes," said Phebe. "But I'm the most ignorant person in the world."

"I can't believe that," said Valentine. His voice was caressing, and he helped her over the gutters as though she

were a child. "Compared with the theaters to which you are accustomed, this one may seem ludicrous. But the play is a success; it's going uptown next week. It's called 'The Emperor Jones' — does that give you any clue to its character?"

Phebe hazarded a guess. "Something like 'Richard the Third' or 'Henry the Fourth'?"

Valentine laughed. "You'll see."

Phebe was about to make a humble confession, but she blushingly closed her lips.

"Here we are," said Valentine, pushing open a door. "Why, we're late!"

He guided Phebe to a seat in the darkness and helped her lay back her coat. There was only time for him to explain that the theater had once been a barn and for Phebe to answer that she had lunched in a stable, before the curtain rose upon a tropical scene. In the foreground in a rough building stood a thronelike seat, painted red. On the base was a large dinner-bell and a man's straw hat with flowers stuck in the brim. In the doorway, opening upon a stretch of sand and a cluster of palm trees, lounged an emaciated creature in a nondescript uniform topped by a helmet. His face was covered with a sparse, unshaven growth of beard, and from his tiny eyes shone meanness and cunning. Toward him, creeping, came a shriveled witch, whom he struck with his whip.

Phebe forgot everything; even her cruel disappointment lying like a bitter spring in the bottom of her heart ceased to send up waves of misery. She leaned forward, her chin on her hand, hypnotized.

From the doorway of an inner building issued a negro in the cast-off uniform of a British admiral, a murderer and braggadocio who had made himself dictator of a negro set-

tlement and who was now at the end of his reign. The witch was the last of his retainers to flee, the Cockney in the doorway remained only to mock, and in the distance a dull, at first almost imperceptible, beating of drums indicated preparations for his destruction.

From the moment that the curtain lifted until the fatal moment upon which it descended, Phebe spoke only to ask a few questions. Valentine talked steadily in the intervals, telling her about the playwright and his successes and failures, and about the people near at hand. He introduced Phebe to the woman on his left, but Phebe did not hear her name. He said that he had had several plays produced and that he had another waiting its turn.

"Uptown managers watch everything we do," he explained.

Phebe did not hear; poor Jones, fleeing through the grim forest, came to realize that his feet were blistered, that his cache of food was lost, that the drums were beating nearer and nearer, and that close at hand were ghostly and mysterious lights in the undergrowth. Valentine shook his head; usually women listened to him — all the women at the Dennis's, all his many professional acquaintances, and especially Eileen Daub about whom he had been teased, the sole heir to an enormous fortune made in cocoa butter, whom he had met when he went with Roberts on an errand to her father's house. He said no more until the play was over and poor Jones's cruel journey ended. Then Phebe got up dizzily.

"Did you enjoy it?" asked Valentine.

"Y-yes," said Phebe a little slowly.

Once more Valentine gave her up. He piloted her slowly out through the chattering crowd to the narrow, dimly lighted street, reflecting that Phebe was one of the women who are worth being friendly with only for the pleasure of contemplating them. He would like to show her off.

"Do have something to eat," he invited. "Come to 'The Purple Horse' or 'Sally's Garret' — you ought to see them."

"I'd rather go home," answered Phebe. On the Dennis steps she made her confession. "This is my first play."

Valentine was smitten dumb.

"How old are you?" he said at last.

Phebe laughed. "Twenty-two — how old are you?"

"That's my age in years. But in experience — a hundred and twenty-two. You're not going right to bed, are you?"

"Yes," said Phebe.

"Wait just a minute! Gertrude said you were going to the Greek Cathedral in the morning — beseech her to let me go with you." He opened the door and they stepped into the dimly lighted hall. "Good-night, you infant!"

"Seeing plays makes you young, not old," said Phebe.

Gertrude was in bed, but she turned and opened her eyes.

"Light the light," she said. "I don't mind. Did you enjoy the play?"

"That isn't exactly the word — it isn't big enough."

Gertrude laughed. "And Valentine?"

"He's a pleasant youth."

"I wish he'd go elsewhere to live," said Gertrude sleepily.

"Why?"

"It's hard on these unattached females to have him round. He's too good-looking and too pleasant."

"Why, he's young enough to be the son of any of them!"

"That has nothing to do with it." Gertrude turned back, her face to the wall, her hand under her cheek. "If you're wise you'll go to sleep at once."

But Phebe did not go to sleep at once. She did not think of "Emperor Jones," or Valentine, or even for the first five minutes of her disappointment — she thought of her bedfellow.

"Gertrude," she said at last, "if you're awake, please tell me at what age people cease to think about love."

"Before they begin if they're wise," said Gertrude, still more drowsily. "Will you please go to sleep?"

III

PHEBE seemed to be swaying on a high deck above the sea and hearing at the same time the distant throb of drums; some danger was drawing nearer and nearer. She sat up, terrified.

"What's the matter?" asked Gertrude from her place at the bureau. "Nightmare?"

"No," said Phebe, staring at the dark furniture of the Dennis guest-room. "I couldn't get awake."

"It's half-past eight," said Gertrude. "We start right after breakfast."

"Mr. Levering wishes to go with us."

"Well, he can't," answered Gertrude promptly. "He won't be up, and he'd be a nuisance."

Phebe's vitality returned slowly, and she was not fully awake when she and Gertrude had their breakfast. When they crossed the Square to the terminus of the bus line, dry and crystalline snow was falling like a veil between them and the objects of the outer world. There were no other passengers, and they selected the front seat of the lumbering vehicle, propping their feet on the low radiator. The color had come back into Phebe's cheeks, but she did not look happy. It was now after nine and they would leave at three, and she saw no prospect of being able to communicate with Crusen even if he had returned.

"I'm not going to talk," announced Gertrude. "This doesn't need any commentator."

The buildings loomed vast and dim, and the trees in the Squares were coated with snow. There were almost no

pedestrians and few cars. At regular intervals along the avenue stood firemen washing the snow away with powerful streams of water. Buildings and trees were seen through a haze, now gray, now a pale, luminous pink. In spite of her good intentions Gertrude could not hold her tongue.

"Look back and see the hill behind us! Here where the Library stands was once a Potter's field, then a reservoir. There's St. Patrick's! There's St. Thomas's! I showed you them yesterday — and the University Club."

Phebe's heart leaped, then subsided painfully. Before she could guess in which house Crusen lived, they had rumbled past. Presently Gertrude bade her dismount and led her down a closely built cross-street.

"I see no church," said Phebe, "much less a cathedral."

"But here it is." Gertrude paused before a narrow ecclesiastical façade, surmounted by bluish green, bulbous towers. Passing through a dark vestibule which had a strange odor, she pushed against an inner door and led the way into a square room whose height seemed double that of the length and width. On a platform at the front was a long screen covered with brilliant holy pictures. Her mind struggled for a word — she grasped it from some dim recollection — *iconostasis*, a place for icons. Directly under the circular skylight which was the only window stood an ambo and throne. Everywhere were bright, barbaric colors.

Phebe forgot her disappointment in curiosity. Gertrude drew her to a place against the left wall and whispered that she might lean if she grew tired. Clearly no one sat down. Suddenly the strange place seemed familiar. She had read "Anna Karénina" and she saw a crowd of men and women in evening clothes, Kitty Scherbatsky in her bridal dress with her expression of innocence and truthfulness, Levin nervous, overwhelmed at the thought of winning in a few moments his

heart's desire, and an old priest turning the leaves of a book while melting wax dripped audibly from fat wedding candles.

She was recalled to the present by Gertrude's nudging. Several bearded priests and deacons pushed open the gilded doors in the middle of the screen, and advanced upon a strip of carpet toward the corner, where a door opened and an old man appeared. He was kissed on hands and forehead and led forward to the throne where his sweeping black robe was removed and his plump body revealed in a crimson cassock. He was at once reclothed in alb and stole of white silk, stiff with silver, and stiff cuffs, also of silver cloth, were tied upon his wrists, each garment being kissed by him and by those who robed him. A mitre was put upon his head in place of his tall black hat, a cross was hung upon his breast, a strange short staff put into his hand, and he was seated on the throne.

Suddenly there sounded a note of music, the lowest tone of a chord, then three others in an ascending scale, all faintly uttered in a rich male voice between closed lips. Phebe looked up and saw two persons at the front of a little gallery. One was a bearded man in a dull red cassock, the other a pale young woman in a suit and hat. The cantor lifted his arms as though to evoke some magical manifestation and a soft chorus responded, unaccompanied and thrilling. Phebe's eyes sought Gertrude's, then they returned to the profile of the cantor and the still white face of the girl. Her rich, medium voice carried the air round which a score of invisible singers wove melodies. In the priest's deep bass was an organ tone which established and maintained a foundation for the whole harmonic structure.

The church filled rapidly, and at last Gertrude and Phebe were pressed against the wall. Closing her eyes, Phebe gave up trying to follow the elaborate ritual or identify the scripture passages; she listened only to the music. Pure music

was always most satisfactory, and she thought of this with its unintelligible words as pure music. Occasionally she looked up — the cantor stood stolidly, singing without effort, but the girl's face was gray, and she leaned again against a pillar. But she sang on and on.

"Come," whispered Gertrude at last. "We've been here two hours, and there's only a sermon after this." She pushed her way gently through the devout throng which did not seem conscious of her passing.

"Some music," she said when she stepped out into the deep snow. "At four we must be at the ferry."

Phebe grew as pale as the young woman in the choir. She saw the Granger station, the dingy automobile in which they would ride, the mass of the great building. Everything would be so dreadfully the same, and she would not have seen Crusen! She glanced frantically round.

"I'd like to stop at that drug-store, Gertrude."

"Run along," said Gertrude. "I'll walk slowly to the corner. But don't waste any time."

"*Circle 2123*," gasped Phebe. "Mr. Crusen, please."

"Mr. Crusen is still out of the city," said a voice which was slightly impatient and slightly amused.

IV

AGAIN William Neuweiler and his family were driving. The August evening was clear and still. The sky was a pale blue with a band of opal on the eastern horizon. In the west a few light clouds were flushed with rose. Beside William sat Phebe, behind them Beulah with Aunt Rosie and the children. There were three children now, one in Beulah's arms, one on Aunt Rosie's lap, and one between them. This summer Phebe had put the Granger library in order and had assisted with the midsummer correspondence and had pre-

pared her courses for the winter. She had also paid her debts, both to Granger College and to Uncle Heimbach, though the latter had demurred.

"When I go, you and Beulah share half and half," said he. "I talked this over with Beulah and William and Neuweiler, too. Everybody knows how it is to be."

Gertrude Dennis was in Europe once more. Of Crusen Phebe heard nothing, neither from him directly, nor of him in Millerstown. He had never, so far as she could learn, been back. She sat on the porch in the evenings visualizing his figure with head bent above his book. Once her heart stood still. She was reviewing each detail of her drive with him, and she remembered how she had spoken of Ambrose Weidner. Had Crusen disapproved of her amusement? She wished her words unsaid, and she disliked Ambrose all the more, as though he had been to blame.

In the afternoons she sewed at Vinnie Most's, listening to Vinnie's stories and to the humming of the bees and looking out over the yard and the fields. Vinnie often looked at her sharply. Phebe neither cared about the cut of her clothes nor was interested in hearing stories.

"We will soon need a seven-passenger," declared William. "Then John can sit on the little seat between."

"Shall you buy the same make of car?" asked Phebe.

"Yes, sir," answered William. "This car stands the wear and tear."

Phebe smiled — William's car was subjected to little wear and no tear. His goodness and friendliness and the very act of smiling restored the old Phebe, and she saw that they were traveling through deep meadows, brimming with variegated green, and bordered with ancient oaks and with lindens whose fruit showed pale yellow against the dark leaves.

"Where are we going?"

"Back home, along the mountain road," explained William. "They say those fellows up here are taking out a lot of ore. It is a company of rich men from New York. It's hard to tell how they heard about this, it was all shut up for so long."

"Are they taking ore from Ambrose Weidner's mine?"

"Yes," answered William, frowning. "Nobody knows much about it. You see the ore was there all the time, but they only found out now how to separate it."

Phebe smiled — she knew far more about the matter than William. The little smile remained as they journeyed along the twilight road toward the Weidner house. Light cars jingled by, filled with hilarious men, and they met many foot-passengers who smoked long pipes.

"Outlanders," explained William. "They go to Red Hill, to the hotel."

A heavy car left a scant share of the road.

"The superintendent," said William. "He's too bossy. I would show such fellows if I didn't have the children in!"

"I hear music," said Phebe.

"The outlanders have such accordions. They are always playing."

Upon the Weidner house they came suddenly. The undergrowth had been cut out, the trees had been thinned and pruned, and the solid, firmly built house made habitable. A wide porch had been added, and on it Phebe could see the light colors of women's dresses. Her dull pain sharpened to acute misery.

"Does Mr. Crusen ever come back?" she asked desperately.

"Not that I know of," answered unsuspicious William. "The people said he went to New York."

Phebe heard a woman laugh.

"Slow up a little, William!"

But Crusen was not there — there were only women on the porch.

"It's a nice old place — in summer, anyhow," said William. "Winters I wouldn't like it."

They climbed the hill, passing populous tenement houses where children sprawled on the ground and women sat on the doorsteps, gossiping in foreign tongues.

"You can't believe that this is our America!" said William, speaking earnestly in Pennsylvania German.

They coasted smoothly down the road to Millerstown. As William helped his wife from the car at the gate, he held her for an instant in his arms, and Phebe observed the caress with strong, unnatural, unwholesome distaste. There were moments when it seemed impossible that Beulah should have known love, and she remain unsought.

V

Summoned to Miss Preston's office, Phebe left Gertrude in the hall. Supper was over, and they were about to walk until the postman came at half-past seven. Neither was likely to receive any personal mail, but there was forever the chance that Gertrude might be notified that the coveted position was hers, or that Phebe might hear from Crusen. Gertrude made her heart's desire known to the world; Phebe's was hidden in her own breast. Stannard had apparently dropped out of sight and no inquiry brought any response. Phebe had recently written at length, assuring him of her well-being and asking only to hear from him, and she had sent three copies to three different addresses, but all had been returned.

Miss Preston bade Phebe sit down. It was five years since she had summoned her to reprove her, and it seemed to her that Phebe had not changed except to grow more attractive and more self-sufficient. She, herself, was thinner and grayer,

and more conscious, in Phebe's company at least, of her body. At times she hated Phebe, but more often she loved her. On her desk lay a document folded in three long sections and upon this document she laid her hand.

"We're making our plans for next year, Miss Stannard, and we hope that you will return."

Phebe shivered, but she uttered a brave "Thank you."

"We shall have another instructor in your department. It is largely due to you that its popularity has increased. You may have your choice between a new course in eighteenth-century prose and one in modern English literature — say from 1880 on."

Phebe's eyes showed real delight. She did not have time to read late books — this would give her an opportunity. She forgot that she had vowed not to stay another year.

"I'd rather take the modern literature."

"It will be hard. You'll find few reference books."

"I don't mind that," said Phebe. "One ought to be able to make up one's mind for one's self."

"Your salary will be eighty dollars beside your living expenses."

"But I'm not perfectly sure of staying."

"You'd be making a mistake to change your position now," said Miss Preston sharply. "Especially when you're having the opportunity to vary your work. You're adjusted to the life here and you can apply yourself to study. You have the use of a fine organ without charge, a privilege which you will hardly have elsewhere."

Phebe blushed — the mention of the organ recalled the unpleasant attentions of Bland. She had recently limited her practice because he came with offers of music and conversation. She selected hours when she knew that he would be in his own house, but the sound of the organ seemed to carry

through closed doors and windows and across many feet of space. Lately he had taken to presenting her with candy, and once a box of violets had come anonymously.

"I do understand and I'm grateful," she said to Miss Preston.

"I don't believe you can do any better."

"Perhaps not." Phebe lifted the contract and read it through.

"Why not sign it now?"

"I might as well," said Phebe.

Miss Preston was conscious once more of an unnatural indifference, a lack of interest in life, and she longed to fathom this strangeness. Had Phebe some secret wretchedness, some family shame? Had she suffered a blighting experience which was eating into her soul?

"Are you busy?" Miss Preston asked. "Why not talk to me?"

"I have an appointment," said Phebe. "I'm sorry. I can come again at another time, later this evening, perhaps."

"I shall be engaged then," answered Miss Preston stiffly. She had thought of asking Phebe to go abroad with her, but she knew now that she would never have the courage to give this invitation.

Gertrude and Phebe looked back at the towering building with its lighted windows. In the mild March evening most of the windows were open and they could hear voices and laughter.

"Why is it that people in the mass are so disproportionately unattractive?" asked Gertrude. "One girl is pleasant enough, perhaps interesting; ten are tolerable; but a hundred are repellent."

"They're a mass of goodness, or a mass of dullness," said Phebe. "A mass of anything is unattractive."

They crossed the campus to the brow of the hill and sat down on a bench. The abyss below them was dark, and the river was discerned only by its lovely sound, the farmhouses by their faint lights. Gradually the sky became blue-black and velvety, except in the west where there remained a band of cold green.

"I signed a contract for another two years," announced Phebe.

"That suits me, as long as I'm here. How much money have you saved?"

"A hundred dollars. I've lived on pretty nearly nothing. Next year I can do better; I'm to have eighty dollars."

"At the end of two years you should be able to go to New York for a year. She'll give you leave of absence rather than lose you."

"Will she?" said Phebe idly.

"Of course. You can live with me at the aunts' — that is, if I'm there. Now listen to me, Phebe. Before I went into library work I considered taking a doctor's degree in English. That was what the aunts wanted me to do, but I didn't think I was smart enough. But that's what you're going to do, at Columbia. Then you'll be prepared for anything."

Phebe shivered. Miss Preston had a doctor's degree, so had Miss Birely. Miss Catterson had been educated before the day of doctors' degrees for women, or she would have had one too. Suddenly her thoughts were taken from herself by a harsh barking from the southern quarter of the horizon.

"What is that noise, Gertrude? — over there."

"Wild geese," said Gertrude. "We'll see 'em pass."

Against the pale green border of the sky showed a V-shaped black line. The separate units which composed it could be easily distinguished and also the stately gliding with which the travelers changed their positions without changing their formation.

"Did you never see them before?" asked Gertrude.

"No."

"They must have passed over your head a thousand times. Oh, Phebe, the pleasure you have before you in this world!"

Phebe did not answer, but she remembered the deep emotion she had felt before on this spot, the sense of elation, the consciousness of indestructible individuality, of freedom from everything but her own will. She felt no such elation now.

According to her custom Gertrude quoted poetry.

"Thou born to match the gale (thou art all wings),
To cope with heaven and earth and sea and hurricane,
Thou ship of air that never furl'st thy sails,
Days, even weeks untired and onward, through spaces, realms gyrating,
At dusk thou look'st on Senegal, at morn America,
Thou sport'st amid the lightning-flash and thunder-cloud,
In them, in thy experiences, hadst thou my soul,
What joys! what joys were thine!"

"A different bird," said Gertrude, "but 'twill serve."

"Are you happy, Gertrude?" asked Phebe.

"I shall be," laughed Gertrude, "some day."

"There's the postman, but I don't expect anything," said Phebe, to cheat Fate. "I'll go upstairs."

But Gertrude brought a letter. Reading it by the table in their common sitting-room, Phebe was racked by conflicting necessities, first to laugh, then to cry. As one certain of success, Bland made her an offer of marriage.

"There is a disparity in our ages" — Phebe saw the large body, the thick beard, the wrinkles round the corners of the eyes, the brown spots on the white hands — "but my superior age assures you tender care. We are congenial and that is everything. Music will brighten and ennoble our lives."

What, Phebe wondered, did Bland propose to do with his

children while he and she lived their ennobled lives? She would show the letter to Gertrude — Granger owed them a good laugh together. She looked up at Gertrude, and met an intent stare.

"What is it?"

Gertrude pushed her letter across the table.

"When I was at the Library last winter, they promised me the next job," she said thickly. "I've got it. A fine one."

"Have you?" said Phebe. She folded her own letter and put it away. "Shall you leave soon?"

"Yes," said Gertrude briefly. "At once."

VI

All day a storm whirled round Granger Hill like that in which Miss Preston five years ago pictured the bleak end of the planet. At sunset the wind fell, and with it and more rapidly the temperature. A red sun incarnadined the windows so that from the valley the whole great building seemed to be filled with flame and those who looked up suddenly were appalled. When the sun sank, the world seemed left to utter cold.

The college was astir. The Glee Club had engaged to give a concert at Glenville, fifteen miles away, and after a day of uncertainty it was decided that the engagement might be kept. Five automobiles were to carry Professor Bland, the twenty members of the club, and Miss Stannard, who at the last minute was required to act as substitute pianist.

At seven o'clock the party gathered in the hall. Bland was muffled in a thick overcoat with an astrakhan collar, as inevitable a decoration as a velvet neck-ribbon to a fading beauty. He was excited, both at the prospect of the entertainment and over another prospect, as yet a secret to himself.

In the club were all types, blonde and brunette, handsome and homely, talented and dull, vivacious and quiet, hoydenish and sedate. Each girl carried a leather suitcase, labeled like Phebe's papier-maché suitcase of long ago with a flag. In the party there was only one fur coat, but there were many pairs of silk stockings. The students of Granger were not opulent, but neither were they poverty-stricken.

Phebe sat inside the door of the reception-room. She wore a dark blue coat and a little green velvet turban, not unlike the one selected for her by Miss McGrath. She had still not changed materially in appearance, though the outline of her face was more firm and the glance of her eye more steady. The color and wave and thickness of her hair were the admiration of the college, and her manner of dressing it a source of astonishment. Her ears showed plainly, and it was as contrary to the mode to show one's ears as it was to hide one's legs.

Phebe was re-reading "Anna Karénina" and in her absorption she did not hear the giggled coupling of her name with that of Bland. As a happily married man, Bland had been the object of romantic interest; now as a pathetic widower he was the object of amusement. Phebe had declined his offer of a year ago, but he had by no means accepted his dismissal. She fancied his devotion unsuspected by any one but herself; she did not dream that his tender glances made it apparent to the whole school. Her increasing reserve, and especially the devotion of Bland, which seemed to the students intensely funny, had deprived her during the school-year of the adoration with which she had been regarded. At the present moment Fayette Sieberger, the most mischievous of the club, whispered, "Look at him — he thinks she isn't here!"

Phebe's absorption in her book played her a sorry trick.

As the automobiles drove to the door, Bland spied her bent head and calculated with lightning speed the number of cars and the seats in each, and bundled his singers in. When the fifth car came to the door there was no one left but himself and Phebe. Profoundly annoyed, Phebe stepped in.

"Are you going to take your book?" Bland inquired, his excessive satisfaction putting a little quiver into his voice.

"Oh, yes," said Phebe. She not only clutched the book under her arm, but held it with her hand — it had somehow the significance of a life-preserver to a drowning person.

Wrapping the blanket about her, Bland could not refrain from administering a tender pat to her knee. As he did so she shrank to the side of the car and fixed her eyes upon the hunched shoulders of the chauffeur. Bland would surely not renew his suit in the presence of this man, nor would he enlist his services in any insane abduction. This absurd possibility rendered her almost hysterical.

Sitting in his own corner, Bland discussed the evening's programme.

"The chorus work will go well, particularly the operetta, and so will Miss Sieberger's recitations. I'm not so sure about Miss Root in 'The Nightingale and the Rose,' which is long and perhaps a little beyond her. But we shall not have a critical audience."

"You asked them not to have the piano on the platform?" said Phebe.

"I did, though your presence would add to the ensemble."

"I no longer belong with youth and beauty," said Phebe.

"Oh, Miss Stannard, you —"

Phebe realized the approach of a protesting hand.

"Do you expect a good audience?" she asked, drawing still nearer to the side of the car.

"Yes," answered Bland. "Our alumnæ have worked the matter up splendidly, and it is the only entertainment Glenville will have this winter. I wish you were going to have a more prominent part. If we could secure halls with pipe-organs you should certainly play at every concert."

"I should certainly not," said Phebe to herself.

"You haven't been practicing as much as usual."

"I've been busy. I have a heavy schedule."

"You're not particularly fond of teaching, are you? Not that you do not do it well."

"No, I'm not."

"Are you fond of domestic life?"

"Yes," answered Phebe, without thinking. At this moment the chauffeur lost the rut made for him and the sudden jerk sent Phebe into a pair of too-ready arms. Fortunately the car as it righted itself tossed her to her place. She determined that she would walk back to Granger rather than ride with Bland alone.

"If you touch me, I'll kill you," she muttered to herself, and found comfort in this violence.

The car drew up at the public hall of Glenville. The plan of the town was that of a Greek cross, a long diameter and two cross-arms, one at right angles, and one aslant, and the hall stood in an obtuse angle, askew with both streets. The last of the cars carrying the Glee Club was driving away, and the chattering girls already filled the small dressing-room.

Helped out tenderly by Bland, Phebe stepped into the hall, which was frescoed in dingy, grayish green and illuminated by a half-dozen high-powered electric lights in blue bulbs. The platform was hidden by a curtain on which advertisements were painted irregularly like the patches of a crazy quilt. About fifty persons sat quietly on unsubstan-

tial folding chairs, and in the rear a score of loutish boys occupied a little gallery.

Phebe made her way to the piano and took off her coat and spread her music on the rack. She wore a dark blue dress which was ornamented only by a narrow lace collar. She held her smooth head high, and an observer might have said that, whether or not she was superior to every one in the room, she at least felt herself to be.

Bland, following close upon her heels, took off his overcoat and laid it on a front seat. He had entirely forgotten his rejection, and he bent over Phebe as she sat at the piano, tenderness in every motion. The two alumnæ who had arranged the concert came forward to speak to him, and the room filled rapidly. Suddenly he tapped with his baton on the floor of the platform, took his place in front of it, and the curtain rose jerkily. He thrust his arms outward to relieve his elbows of the confining pressure of sleeves which were a little tight.

A smothered guffaw echoed through the hall before his first downward stroke. The singers, standing on the high platform in two rows, in short décolleté dresses, were a new and interesting sight to Glenville, which was uninstructed in modern fashions. The young bodies were not all perfectly shaped, a fact which the rude boys were quick to recognize. Fortunately the volume of fresh voices drowned out all other sounds.

The first number was a curiously accompanied collection of patriotic and popular songs. "The Suwanee River" was set, not to its own appropriate chords, but to the music of the Dvořák "Humoresque." In the second selection, "America," the singers produced large handkerchiefs of red, white, and blue, which they first waved in the air, then wove into Liberty caps. The "Star-Spangled Banner" was elaborated

by skyward pointings, pressure of hands to hearts, and great emotional fervor.

Phebe hated the waving of flags and the gesticulating, and still more the nonsensically combined music, but she played as well as she could. Having supported Miss Root firmly through her tremulous performance, she listened to Fayette Sieberger.

Fayette was the president of the club, and also the tallest, best-looking, most lively, and most ill-mannered. She had a gift for mimicry, and in her first number she took the part of a farmer at the circus; in the second, she was a little child describing the milking of a cow. Both were received with shouts of delight, and the latter, for which she donned a wide red sash and a childish bow in her hair, and of which the concluding line was

"And squirts, and squirts, and squirts,"

she was compelled to repeat twice.

The second half of the programme consisted of the operetta of which Bland thought so highly, "An original playlet, introducing a military and naval parade, readings, and various vocal numbers." In the military and naval parade powder-puffs, lip-sticks, and eyebrow pencils were produced and used by the aid of little mirrors, the motions being set to the tune of a quickstep written by Bland. Phebe turned her eyes away and played automatically. The audience demanded a second performance and would have liked a third. Fayette covered herself with glory in a half-dozen selections after the style of Walt Mason. The concluding number was a *pot-pourri* of third-rate vocal compositions.

Phebe folded her music and put on her coat. The girls trooped down the aisle, their eyes searching for the eyes of young men and failing to find them. In the bottom of

almost every heart the hope of masculine acquaintance had been cherished, but the country boys were too shy to return the inviting glances, and, deprived of conquest, the girls exhibited an impish gayety and mischief.

Phebe had meant to be the first on the steps, but again a moment of absent-mindedness delayed her. Determined not to return in the company of Bland alone, she stepped to the first car and opened the door.

"Are you full in here?" she asked.

There was no answer. The seat by the driver was unoccupied, but the students were conscious that Miss Stannard was for once in a position to be annoyed. Fayette Sieberger said at last, "Yes, Miss Stannard."

Phebe turned to the second car. The occupants were possessed by the same mischief.

"Is there any room here?"

"No, Miss Stannard."

The third and fourth cars had glass windows; she could see that they were filled. Then the other girls had deceived her! By accident the order of the cars had been changed and the last to arrive was an ancient taxicab in which the rear seat was separated from the driver's and was deep and dark and secluded. Helpless, Phebe stepped in, Bland following upon her heels, and the door clicked shut behind them.

"We had a fine entertainment," he said briskly. "The young ladies acquitted themselves well, and you always do. It's a pity that the audience was not more sophisticated."

Phebe made a little grimace. How, she wondered, would a sophisticated audience receive Miss Root?

"Everything went better than I expected," said Bland.

They soon left the town and between the moonlit fields of snow the car ran heavily. There was an instant's silence, and Phebe began to be panic-stricken. She was tired and

angry and depressed, and it seemed to her that the large body beside her expanded like some sort of magic mountain. It was towering higher and higher, growing wider and wider. Its peak bent toward her. She knew that her safety lay in brisk, light talk which should allow no entering wedge of sentiment, but she could think of nothing to say. She held "Anna Karénina" tight with both hands.

"Miss Stannard," said Bland, "I'm afraid I did not make clear in my note of last spring how deep are my affection and admiration. Since the day when you first became my pupil I have l—" Bland gasped, he had been a married man then, and for several years thereafter, and he had been about to say "loved"! — "I have been — ah! interested in your progress. Latterly this sentiment deepened. You do not like teaching — I can relieve you. My little family is lovable. You are not meant for a life of loneliness. I have read in your eyes that you are made to love and be loved. Why not yield to your destiny? Will you not marry me?"

"I respect you," said Phebe. "I feel honored by your offer. But I don't love you."

"You could if you would try!" said Bland with conviction.

"That isn't my idea of love." Mistress of herself, Phebe began to be amused.

"Is there some one else?" asked Bland.

"No!" said Phebe. But to less dull ears, her cry would have said "yes!"

Bland put out his large hand, whose tremendous reach from key to key and manual to manual was his boast, and took into it both of Phebe's and a part of "Anna Karénina."

"Books are so cold, so unresponsive — you cannot spend your life with them any more than you can with music. Darling!" The last word burst out like a sob.

"Take your hand away," said Phebe coldly.

Bland obeyed — there was something irresistibly commanding in the young voice; it was like the icy breath of the night. The silence deepened, the car jerked from side to side, and the interminable miles passed without a word until at last the engine panted up Granger Hill. Bland still said nothing; he was cruelly hurt, as Miss McGrath and Dean Preston had been hurt.

When they reached the college, Phebe opened the door and stepped out unaided and went up the steps. She walked slowly, her head in air, superb in youth and self-confidence, and furious with Fate which denied her what she wanted and gave her this worthless gift.

She climbed one flight, then another. It was past eleven and the building was quiet, except for smothered whispers and laughter from the returning Glee Club. Preferring to live alone, now that Gertrude was gone, Phebe occupied a room on the third floor. As she opened the door a letter fell from the knob behind which it had been tucked by some kindly fellow teacher. She turned on the light and the electric stove, and when she had brewed a cup of chocolate she sat down with it steaming on the table to read her letter which came from Beulah. Beulah wrote twice a month in spite of her increasing cares and of the difficulty with which she composed. Her affection for Phebe had not abated in the least, nor would it, though she had a dozen children.

Phebe's fingers fluttered as she opened the flap. There was always the chance that Crusen might appear in Millerstown and inquire for her. Only this could be of importance in Beulah's letter.

But Phebe was mistaken. Beulah's message was important, though it had, at first glance at least, nothing to do with Crusen. Word had come to Heimbach of Stannard's death. He had left a substantial property in stock of the Evening

Star Mining Company of Blaine, Montana, which was yielding ten per cent interest, and Phebe was his only heir.

Phebe forgot her chocolate. Warmed by an inward flame, she forgot her cold body. She did not grieve for her father — he was a stranger; but she felt a profound gratitude to him. After a while she undressed and went to bed and lay sleepless. She scarcely wondered how he died; her knowledge of him was so slight that she did not visualize any detail of his experience. She saw instead, Alexander Crusen, and heard his voice, light and clear and crisp.

"You won't forget New York?"

She heard Gertrude's laughing quotation,

"Had I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,
The house for me, no doubt, were a house in a city square."

She remembered passages from Gertrude's letters, exclamatory, pleading. "If you don't come, I'll never forgive you! . . . I've made out your schedule for the first year. Everything can be arranged. . . . I have met Ada Haldeman — she's more wonderful than I thought and more beautiful. She's like a lovely violet on a stalk. Her eyes are exactly like violets. But her mind is the best part of her. . . . Oh, Phebe, come and live!"

She saw the city, its crowds — they seemed to her happy crowds — its palaces, its shops, its collections of books and pictures, I. Tolstoi's store. She remembered the morning glow on the towers, the glitter and gleam of the avenues, the deep music of the contrabass in the Greek Cathedral. She thought with a warmth which was almost affection of all the inhabitants in the Dennis house, the five sisters, Margaret, Mary, Flora, Irene, Elizabeth — their names suggested to her enamoured soul

"Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,
Margaret, and Rosalys."

She remembered stately Miss Carter and tiny Miss Andrews, both genealogists in their different ways, and huge Miss Vermilye who wrote advertisements, and little Mr. Roberts who decorated rooms, and tall Mr. Jerome who played the violin, and handsome Valentine Levering who wrote plays. Two years had passed since she had seen them, but she hoped that they were just the same. She said to herself, in short, with profound relief from heartsickness, that she would go to New York and find Alexander Crusen. She would go, moreover, quickly. A few weeks ago the Board of Trustees had held a mid-winter meeting and she had walked in to dinner with the youngest and most personable, hearing distinctly, as she passed between two lines of students, an amused exclamation, "Miss Stannard with a man!" It was another hint of an intolerable doom. She would go to New York and find Crusen.

Early in the morning she went to Miss Preston's office.

"My father has died, Miss Preston. I found a message when I came back from the concert."

Dean Preston's slender, ever-ready hand was thrust out.

"You told no one? Called no one?"

She was aware with amazement that Phebe looked disturbed, but not sorrowful.

"Have you no tears for your father?" she asked dramatically.

"I never saw him, Miss Preston. He's been in the West since I was a baby. He has left me sufficient property to be independent and I wish to study at Columbia. I should like to be released from my contract."

"Impossible," said Dean Preston sharply. "Really impossible. It would alter all our plans."

"But I must go," said Phebe stoutly. "You have almost six months to find a substitute. I'll stay during the summer."

"You have signed a contract."

"I signed it under a misapprehension; I expected to have to support myself. If I left now, I should be doing wrong, but it's not wrong to go in June."

Miss Preston turned to her desk, unwilling to trust herself to speak. Phebe was still the light of her eyes. But Miss Preston knew that she could do nothing but yield. She longed to say, "We'll expect you to come back," but she knew that Phebe would never come back.

"I'm sorry if I have offended," said Phebe.

Miss Preston remained silent.

VII

PHEBE lay abed in her old room in Uncle Heimbach's house. It was Saturday in mid-September, and a little after dawn. Beside her lay the oldest of the Neuweiler children. He had been shy at first, but he had succumbed to her blandishments and her gift of a beautiful toy horse, and had finally insisted upon sharing her bed.

During a wakeful night, Phebe heard old familiar sounds, the occasional snore with which Uncle Heimbach rent the quiet, the rattle of the tin cup at the pump halfway down the street, and the wild gallop of a horse. Only one sound was new—the cacophonous roaring and snorting of automobiles. There had been automobiles in Phebe's youth, but they had, it seemed to her, kept respectable hours.

On Monday Phebe was to go to New York. She had been in Millerstown for three dreamlike weeks. In the mornings she sewed with Vinnie, who applauded her taste and skill as of old. In the afternoons she talked to Beulah or walked on the mountain — not on the road, but through the woods where she found scarlet lobelia in the same places along the brook and the same tangle of clematis on the alder bushes, and listened to the old chorus of the insects in the sun, and

marveled, standing long in perfect quiet, at the deep silence in the shadows. In the evening she drove with the Neuweilers, or visited the neighbors and answered a hundred questions about herself and her affairs. Every one knew the amount of her fortune, and it was a pity that no one recommended that it be converted from stock in the Evening Star Silver Mine into more solid securities. It never occurred to Phebe or to Heimbach to alter in any way so unexpected and extraordinary a source of wealth.

"You're not going to school again, Phebe!"

"Yes, I am."

"How old are you?"

"I was twenty-five the other day."

"Ei! yi! But you never cared for beaus; I never heard that you looked at one."

Phebe laughed, remembering the hours she had spent worrying lest Millerstown knew about Hilarius Hersh.

"We all thought — well, Phebe will come with some one from away. And now you're going to learn yet more!"

Now, on Saturday morning, Phebe rose early. Mr. Weygandt, who had baptized and confirmed and married two generations of Heimbachs and Neuweilers, had succumbed to the infirmities of his great age and to-day he was to be buried. Beulah would provide a dinner sufficiently bountiful so that she could invite six or eight of the funeral guests, and she and William and Phebe would attend the service, Phebe taking her old place at the organ. Aunt Rosie would take care of the children, but she could not be expected to do more toward the dinner than to put the viands on the stove at the proper time, and Beulah and Phebe prepared everything and put the house in order before they left. They worked swiftly, as though they had never ceased to work together.

"You seem younger than sometimes," said Beulah. "And happier. Is it because you're going to New York?"

"Perhaps it is."

"*Ach*, Phebe!" — Beulah stopped short in what she was about to say.

"What is it?"

"It was just a foolish idea." Beulah did not finish her sentence, but looked pityingly at Phebe, then round the cool, pleasant kitchen, at the array of freshly baked pies on the table, at John and Henry playing on the floor, and at the baby in his cradle. "There will be many strangers at this funeral. Eight preachers have come from this congregation, and Mr. Weygandt started them all. They will surely come. I expect Ambrose will come back. They say he does well — he has a big, rich church in Philadelphia and the people crowd to hear him."

"Beulah! Not a big, rich church for Ambrose!"

"Ambrose is all right. He was here, and the people thought he was fine. He's made something of himself."

The two dressed together, and together started up the street. Millerstown always seemed to have just been put in order, but this morning the lily had been whitened. Window panes glittered in the sun and doorsteps still showed the dampness of the morning cleansing. In the yards the grass was closely trimmed and the flower beds were carefully outlined with whitewashed stones.

Phebe glanced at the hotel and smiled, so that a traveling man, sitting on the porch, leaned forward, smiling back. She wore a white skirt of some new shining silk and a white waist which she had hemstitched and a black-and-white sailor hat. Beulah wore a long black skirt and hat and black gloves, not alone out of respect for Mr. Weygandt, but because she liked to buy things that could be quickly

selected and that would wear long. Her eyes swept Phebe's figure, then her own plump body.

"Look at us! The people will think you are my daughter!"

Phebe laughed and took Beulah's arm. "Would you change places?"

"I would like to see you have it as good as I do," confessed Beulah.

As Phebe took her place on the organ bench, she saw two black buttons set on a brass plate beneath the stops. It was no longer necessary for a perspiring Willie Kuhns to crouch in the cubby-hole. She remembered Willie's substitute, and wished that she had let Mr. Weygandt ask Hilarius to creep into the dusty cupboard. She pulled out the stops and began to play, filling the church with volumes of heavy sound which drew all eyes in her direction and hurried the steps of those who were approaching. Her playing was still merely accurate and intellectual, but to Millerstown it was perfection. A stranger pronounced the invocation and Phebe sounded the Amen; then the familiar voices behind her, muffled by grief, sang, "Asleep in Jesus, Blessed Sleep."

A new voice said, "Let us pray," and Phebe turned her head to see from the corner of her eye the shoulder and back of a tall figure. She knew at once that this was Ambrose, though his voice and his appearance both were altered. His tones were deep, and there remained traces of Millerstown's accent, though he had been so long away. It was as though the stream of his utterance paused now and then to spread itself into a broader, deeper pool. It was an accent which Phebe would have recognized in the desert of Sahara. Some of his clerical brethren opened their eyes and looked at him, and his fellow citizens listened with pride. He was a living monument to Mr. Weygandt, who lay before him in the majesty of his years and the beauty of his virtues.

When the second hymn was sung, Phebe took her seat behind Beulah, remembering how she used to blow the curls on Beulah's neck. The curls were still there against the soft white skin — if this had not been a funeral she would have set them dancing. Beside Phebe sat Hilarius Hersh, and beyond him William, and next to Beulah sat Elma. Phebe heard her quarreling with Hilarius daily, and she fancied currents of dislike passing from one to the other even in church. At her corner sat Sarah Ann, bent but still monumental in figure and sonorous in voice. Beside her was Lydia Yohe in her black dress, with her ebony hair and her creamy skin on which age had etched a web of tiniest wrinkles. A slow tear stole from under her eyelids — was it not of her faithless lover she thought, rather than of Mr. Weygandt?

In the corner opposite the choir platform sat Ambrose, and from the safe shelter of Beulah's shoulder Phebe regarded him earnestly. He was young and not ill-looking and he had a good mind, yet he was content to be a minister! Perhaps he had selected the profession because only thus could he pull himself out of the slough of Weidnerthal. Suddenly she caught his eye and blushed crimson. He came from Weidnerthal and yet wished to be a minister, and she had been brought up in the Heimbach house with Christians and yet thought of religion as shackles on her wrists and a ball and chain on her ankle. The churchly atmosphere, the heavy air, the sight of Mr. Weygandt's body, the solemn voice of the preacher, and the tears of the people suddenly oppressed her beyond endurance. But she was not going to stay here, praying and being preached to! — she was going to New York. She did not follow the cortège to the cemetery, but hurried out of the empty church and down the pike, partly so as to have some of the work done before Beulah came home, but chiefly to escape the funeral company.

On Sunday she heard Ambrose preach, but she paid little attention. His sermon was not long, but she could not fix her mind upon the discourse. It could not be that her dream was coming true — something would happen; Fate would put out a feline paw and hold her back.

After the service she shook hands a little patronizingly with Ambrose.

"Beulah tells me you preach in Philadelphia."

"And you have been teaching at Granger College?" His voice, deeper and richer in conversation than in oration, was not that of the Pharisaism which she believed was his outstanding characteristic.

"Yes," she said briefly. She was conscious of the close proximity of Hilarius, and she recalled, ashamed, the dim mountain road. She longed to have Ambrose, Hersh, Todd, Miss Preston, Bland — every one she knew — see her in Crusen's company.

"It was a great pleasure to hear you play again."

"Thank you," said Phebe. She laid her hand on Beulah's arm and walked away. "You were right — he has come up in the world," she said lightly. Once more hope brightened and misgivings fled. To-morrow at this moment she would be in New York. Nothing could happen between this time and to-morrow.

Early in the morning she rose. In her trunk closed and locked in the lower hall were all her belongings except her books, which were stored in Beulah's attic; on a chair beside the bureau stood her bag ready to be closed. By half-past six, faint with excitement, she was in the kitchen, where Beulah looked at her anxiously.

"New York is so far away!"

"It isn't farther than the Normal School, and I'm eight years older than when I went there."

"But it's such a big place and there are wicked people."

"I'll watch out for them," laughed Phebe.

She walked toward the door and breathed the morning air. The day-lilies were still in bloom, and from Elma's yard there was the odor of grass newly cut by Hilarius before he went to the station. Near the porch stood a young maple tree on which Phebe observed a curious motion. Every leaf was quiet except one, which, having a longer stem and being caught by a gentle air, danced gayly before its fellows with a ludicrous appearance of wishing to get away. It seemed to Phebe that the tree was Millerstown and she the leaf.

She looked back over her shoulder. How could Beulah live so quietly? Did no storms ever disturb her heart, no longing, no desire to fly, no desire even to scream?

William escorted Phebe to the half-past seven train and stood beside her looking up the gleaming track. He held her handsome black bag — the papier-maché suitcase had long been stored in Beulah's attic. There was no one to take the bag from his hand and carry it up the steps of the car, but inside was the rough draft of a letter addressed to Alexander Crusen and beginning, "I have taken your advice and have come to New York."

PART V

PART V

I

In festal array Phebe climbed to the fifth story of the Dennis house. It was the middle of October, and Roberts and Jerome were giving a party. She wore a white crêpe de chine dress made by Vinnie, and designed and embroidered in green with long stitches by herself. Her eyes were those which watched the clock creeping toward the hour of her appointment with Todd and looked up at Crusen sitting in his buggy in the mountain road. She laid her hand on her heart as though its beat were too rapid or as though she had a talisman there.

Thus far she had spent every available moment out of doors, and her cheeks kept their bright color. At Leesburg walking had been forbidden except in company, and at Granger one was discouraged by the long ascent to the college when one was tired. Now she applied herself to walking as though she were learning a new and delightful game. She felt a constant exhilaration; she was free; Bland and Dean Preston and the horde of girls were forever behind her, and New York was a storehouse filled for her delight.

Her classes, which began at ten each day, were over by two, and she did not linger at the University. Her refusal to join either a graduate or an English club freed her from social activities, and she did not go beyond the bare little classrooms except to the Library, to the steps of which Gertrude had so dramatically led her.

On her long way home she crossed to Central Park and walked a few miles and took the bus, riding down Fifth Avenue at its crowded hour, or measured off brisk miles on the curving drive, visiting Grant's Tomb and the unfinished Cathedral, gazing at Joan of Arc from all sides, resting her eyes on the purple Jersey hills and watching the craft on the river. She wandered round Columbus Circle, and stepped into the Paulist church, defaced by smoke and grime, its famous ceiling wholly invisible. She looked curiously at the throng waiting to confess their sins, and felt a thrill at sight of the distant statue of the Virgin encircled by candle flames and radiant in the gloom. She walked through noisy avenues and down tawdry Broadway. She gave to buildings and statues pointed out by Gertrude a closer scrutiny and looked up their history; she visited museums and galleries, and sat gazing as though she were allowing beauty to fill a hungry heart.

Roberts and Jerome had long planned to give a party, and the announcement that Miss Stannard was coming to live in the Dennis house led them to postpone it from spring to fall. Finally the day was set for the fifteenth of October, and all the household were invited together with Miss Moffatt, Miss Haldeman, and Valentine's admiring Eileen. Miss Haldeman had rooms on Tenth Street, though she might have lived in the huge house of her employer, either as a sort of secretary and exhibitor or as its legal mistress. She liked both Jerome, whom she had known for several years, and Gertrude, who assiduously cultivated her acquaintance. When she looked at Gertrude, she always remembered certain pictures in the Louvre fronted by gleaming blue eyes and lips fixed in an O of rapture.

Roberts feared that Eileen would not find the other guests congenial, but Valentine explained that he was bringing her for her own good. Valentine had recently produced two

one-act plays; in one, the scene was laid in an asylum for dipsomaniacs, and the plot was the attempted reform of an inebriate youth for the sake of a girl whose ultimate refusal caused him to shoot himself; in the other, the scene was laid in a restaurant of doubtful propriety where the heroine ended her life with prussic acid. No manager from uptown had extended a beckoning finger, but the plays had been patronized by groups of dull, well-dressed men and women who looked like superior servants and who roused from unmistakable boredom to applaud frantically.

On the afternoon of the fourteenth, Roberts took a train to Long Island and returned with a huge basket filled with zinnias and marigolds bought from a farmer's wife, and wild asters and goldenrod and sprays of clematis pulled by the wayside. These he arranged in the hall and in Jerome's music-room, saying to himself, "This would have cost Miss Daub fifty dollars, and it has cost me a dollar and fifty cents." He had planned to have a violin recital, and he showed Phebe a collection of Jerome's music and received her promise to accompany him. Jerome was shy and humble, and nothing would have persuaded him to prepare a programme, but when he was caught unawares he played beautifully.

The most extensive preparations were made by Miss Moffatt in her tiny quarters on Macdougal Street, where she occupied her hours out of the store with difficult dressmaking and laundering. Her bureau was cluttered with bottles which contained or had once contained cosmetics. Sometimes she emptied them rapidly, sometimes she grew discouraged and abandoned certain unguents, only to return to them hopefully. In the upper drawer, mixed with old ribbons, old veils and gloves — everything Miss Moffatt had was old — were booklets and leaflets advertising skin foods, washes, powders, pastes, and hair dyes. There were also detached

sheets of paper on which were questionnaires. Miss Moffatt still answered such questions as: "Are you too thin? Too fat?" "What is the predominating expression of your features? Pleasant? Studious? Worried? Ill-natured?" To this last Miss Moffatt's friends could have returned a decided "No." "What is the condition of your hair? Is it falling out? Is it gray?" There were two questions which she always ignored; one was: "Is your company still sought by persons of the opposite sex?" The other: "How old are you?"

This evening she applied a little of many liquids and salves. She had a new red blouse, and she forgot the deficiencies of her shoes and skirt. She believed that the Dennises and their friends were persons of standing and she considered their invitation to be a high compliment. Eileen Daub put on the handsomest of her four evening wraps with no more satisfaction than Miss Moffatt drew on her old coat and tied a shrunken scarf under her peaked chin.

Phebe's upward progress was interrupted by a summons to Miss Carter's door. Miss Carter's room was furnished with her own furniture, and, if heaviness and darkness in one's possessions indicated an important social position, hers was lofty. She stood with her hand on one of the pillars of her four-post bed, as a massive goddess might stand with a giant spear.

"A few hooks, Miss Stannard. I'm the last of my family and the first to do without a maid."

Her dress was black velvet trimmed with ancient, yellowed lace. The sleeves were short and the neck low, and the whole effect astonishing. Miss Carter was less good-looking when so much of her was uncovered.

"This is museum lace," she explained.

"You mean it comes from a museum?" asked Phebe.

"It is to go to a museum. By museum pieces we mean rare pieces. This will be in the Metropolitan with other possessions of my family."

With dancing eyes Phebe climbed the last flight, her hand again upon her heart. She had never been in the bachelor quarters, and she exclaimed at sight of the large, softly lighted room with its beautiful piano, its rugs and books and flowers and pictures. The woodwork of the fireplace had been carved by Roberts as a present to his friend, and its inscription had been selected when it suggested only music and friendliness:

"Wo gesungen wird, da lasst euch nieder,
Denn böse Menschen haben kein' Lieder."

On one side of the fireplace sat Elizabeth Dennis, who had been carried upstairs by her hosts; on the other stood Jerome. Gertrude was walking about, gazing critically at the decorations and inspecting the books, and eventually crossing the hall to admire Roberts's improvised kitchen. She was as happy as Phebe, but she had no difficulty in keeping a sober pace and she did not press her hand to her heart. Her happiness seemed to be rather of the head. She looked at Phebe often as though to assure herself of her actual presence.

Miss Vermilye and Miss Andrews arrived together like a giant and his familiar. Miss Vermilye sat down at the piano and awkwardly picked out a little tune, laughing at herself. Margaret and Mary Dennis came together, looking much alike, then Flora and Irene, also looking much alike. Miss Moffatt believed that it was fashionable to be late, but she could not deny herself a moment of the festivity and panted up the stairs at the last stroke of the hour. When she presented herself after taking off her wraps in Jerome's bedroom, her scarlet waist created a sensation. Miss Carter did not intend to come until half-past eight, but she followed close

upon Miss Moffatt's heels. She considered Miss Moffatt beneath her notice, and she never spoke to her or glanced in her direction.

Ada Haldeman came next. Her name had been in the papers for several days in connection with a sale of Americana where she had bought surveys, maps, old diaries, and memoirs in dingy notebooks, and above all a series of the Jesuit Relations in forty volumes for which she had paid twenty thousand dollars. She looked frail in her dark blue dress and she played nervously with her long chain of carved beads. Gertrude had not exaggerated her delicate grace or the beauty of her blue eyes.

"We're all here but Valentine."

"He'll turn up," said Roberts. "He's gone to get Miss Daub."

The party began by Miss Carter drawing Phebe to a corner to ask in detail about Miss Haldeman, by the two older Dennises finding places with their knitting under two of Jerome's scattered lamps, and by Miss Moffatt drawing up a chair under Elizabeth's wing. Gertrude questioned Ada about her purchase. Roberts was a little uncertain about Jerome's willingness to play, and he wished that Valentine would arrive and the moment of announcement be over. He did not anticipate that other music would be provided.

Upon this quiet scene entered Valentine with his lady, who had been pleased to come. Occasionally the disparity between the number of Valentine's invitations to her and hers to Valentine troubled even her dull and generous soul. She tried to make him see that the difference in their fortunes was nothing, but, bright as he was in other ways, he was blind and dull in this. Eileen expected that he would be in time as famous as Shakespeare, and it was her generosity which filled the theater when "The Spendthrift" and "In a Restaurant" were played.

This evening she and her car were waiting when Valentine arrived. At sight of her he was astonished, then annoyed, but both emotions gave place to amusement. He was constantly on the lookout for new sensations and interesting incidents, and he believed that the appearance of Eileen in Jerome's studio would give him both.

Eileen's dress was resplendent. The low bodice was made of cloth of silver, cloth of gold being no longer the garment of opulence, since platinum jewelry could not be worn with it. Her arms and neck were bare, and from the upper fastening in the back to the top of the girdle there was a carefully designed elliptical opening which revealed four well-padded vertebræ. The short skirt was plaited white chiffon into which were woven threads of silver, and everywhere, so that it formed a gleaming overdress, hung Eileen's jewelry. In her elaborately curled black hair was a platinum comb set with diamonds and in her plump ears were diamond hoops. On her neck lay a platinum chain with a diamond pendant and below her waist hung a longer chain set with diamonds. On both arms platinum gleamed and diamonds glittered in bracelets and wrist-watch, and there were diamonds on her slipper buckles.

She let Valentine wrap her in a light blue broadcloth cloak trimmed with ermine, and she accepted his "Ye gods, what splendor!" as a compliment of the first water. Leading the way to the automobile, she sank among its cushions. The distance between her corner and that in which Valentine stowed himself was wide, but in her innocence she did not know how to bridge it without a sign from him. This sign Valentine did not give; he intended to marry Eileen no more than he intended to marry Miss Carter, and he never yielded to the half-childlike invitation of her round black eyes.

The Dennises were shocked by Eileen, Jerome and Gertrude

and Miss Haldeman amused, Phebe astonished. Gentle Elizabeth felt a warm sympathy, believing that Eileen would be embarrassed in this simply dressed company. From two persons she received all the admiration she expected, Miss Carter who was sensible that society must add to itself riches and Miss Moffatt who was dazzled to the point of stupefaction. Miss Carter bowed profoundly, Miss Moffatt gave a little gasp.

Having said "So glad!" as many times as there were persons present, Eileen sat down on a divan, made room for Valentine beside her and crossed her knees, prepared to like every one. She had arranged to leave early, hoping for a tête-à-tête with Valentine after they reached home, but while she was here she would be as affable as possible. The silence which followed her arrival led her to believe that the company was awed.

"Were you having music?" she asked.

"We were only talking," explained some one. "We see each other often, but we still have a good deal to say."

Miss Carter leaned forward. She sympathized with Miss Daub in this alien society and she wished to call herself to her attention. What she said frightened Valentine.

"You play, I do not doubt, Miss Daub?" She pronounced Eileen's surname as though it were an English common noun.

Eileen glanced at the piano which appeared to be as fine an instrument as her own. At this instant Roberts appeared in the doorway. He looked at Jerome nervously and began to speak.

"Jerome, I have planned —"

Miss Carter was not to be silenced by Roberts, a person to be endured, not encouraged.

"You say that you play, Miss Daub?"

"Oh, everybody does, more or less, I suppose. My father

says if he had the money he's paid for my lessons he could build a new factory."

Roberts, too, was frightened. Jerome would not play if there were some one to play for him.

"Jerome," he said in a louder tone, "I have planned —"

Miss Carter stared at Roberts as one who looks at a distant object through a lorgnette.

"Mr. Roberts, I believe Miss Daub will play for us."

Valentine almost said aloud, "Oh, no!" If he had, his voice would have been lost against the shrill cry of Miss Moffatt, "Oh, please!"

"Well," consented Eileen, "I suppose it's silly to be urged." She uncrossed her knees, revealing a glitter of brilliants where her stockings ended. She looked at Jerome a little doubtfully. "You're sure you don't play the piano?"

"Sure," said Jerome. "You'll play, won't you?"

"If you insist," said Eileen.

"We do," said Miss Carter solemnly. "We do, indeed." She saw herself, appreciated at her true worth, riding in Eileen's elegant car to call upon certain persons who had forgotten her.

Valentine gave Eileen a cold hand and helped her up and she walked to the piano. The eyes of Jerome and Elizabeth and the eyes of Gertrude and Ada met. Gertrude bent over Phebe.

"You'll bite your tongue off when you close your mouth," she whispered.

"What did you say?" asked Phebe, startled.

"Nothing," said Gertrude.

Eileen spread her skirt out on each side; then she placed her hands on her hips.

"Has anybody any favorites?" she asked affably. "Mr. Jerome, you're a musician — you choose."

"Whatever you select will please me," said Jerome. He stood with his elbow on the mantel looking at her politely.

"Valentine, what shall I play?"

Valentine had grown pale. "Whatever you wish."

Eileen's wandering gaze met Ada's wide eyes.

"You choose — these people don't know their minds."

Ada was an earnest student of her own subject, and she attributed to Eileen the same seriousness of purpose. If she played well, she could be forgiven having exhibited her back and her garters.

"I like the older composers," she said. "The Beethoven sonatas are favorites of mine. Opus 13 and 27 and 53 and 57 among the earlier ones. Opus 111 I like best of all."

"Oh, my!" cried Eileen. "I don't play old things. I can play 'The Love Nest.'"

There was silence while Eileen hunted the pedals and the keys. Miss Carter, who had no ear, and Miss Moffatt, to whom Eileen was a celestial planet, looked at her; the others looked at the fire or the floor. Eileen played "The Love Nest," congratulating herself upon missing few melody notes.

"Perhaps you'd like to dance? I'll play a one-step," she offered.

"No," said Gertrude clearly and very politely. "We're not dancers."

But Eileen played the one-step she offered and then another and another.

"That's all I know!" she said at last.

"Thank Heaven!" said Gertrude to Ada.

Roberts was in despair — his evening was ruined. He decided that supper should be served, though it was still early, and perhaps after supper Valentine would take this creature away. Miss Vermilye and Miss Andrews followed him to the kitchen. Sensitive Elizabeth feared some loud

hysterical outburst, but there was no sound except the gentle click of plate against plate.

Eileen returned to the divan, and to her side went the ladies one by one. Their comments sounded like compliments; they said chiefly that she was very good to play and she answered that music enlivened an evening.

"Doubtless you go to many concerts," said Gertrude as though she were studying some specimen.

"Not often, though of course we buy lots of tickets. If I thought you folks would care for them, I'd send them down."

"That would be kind," said Gertrude.

Phebe and Ada had their salad and coffee together in a corner. There was every reason why they should be friends, and Phebe was now willing to make friends with any one. Under pretense of adjusting her girdle, she laid her hand once more across her heart. When Phebe and Ada remained away from her side, Eileen looked possessively at Valentine and laughed and pitied them. At eleven she rose to go. She let herself be seen in the doorway in her pale blue cloak, and toward her, as though drawn by a magnet, her hands clasped, went Miss Moffatt. Her gesture said clearly, "Oh, how beautiful you are!"

"Perhaps we could take Miss Moffatt home," suggested Valentine.

Miss Moffatt accepted with a gasp of delight. She had not seen Eileen's car, but she had seen the advertisements of cocoa butter which extended from the Battery to the Botanical Gardens. Though she had not meant to leave so early, she wrapped herself up and followed Eileen and Valentine down the steps. She stumbled in her excitement and Valentine steadied her with his hand on her elbow.

"This is a great honor. And privilege," she declared as she sank into a corner of the luxurious car.

The footman heard her proudly spoken address with amazement. "Macdougal Street, opposite Macdougal Alley" — what a strange friend for Miss Daub!

On the way uptown Valentine did not sit quite in the corner. His pity for Eileen was like Eileen's pity for Ada and Phebe, entirely uncalled for, but it had an important effect, for presently he laid his hand on the plump ringed hand lying on the cushion beside him. He made no further advances, he did not even accompany Eileen beyond her door. Recovering his balance he was annoyed, but he did not suspect that the camel had put his nose inside his tent.

When Valentine and the two ladies had gone, Miss Carter announced that she, too, would leave.

"But the party isn't over!" protested Roberts.

"I'm a little indisposed," said Miss Carter. She spoke the truth — the attention paid Miss Moffatt made her ill.

Jerome escorted her to her door, and when he returned he beheld an extraordinary scene. Before him upon her knees was the guest of honor, his violin in her outstretched hands. Grouped round with supplicating gestures were his other guests.

"Oh, please!" begged Phebe.

"Miss Stannard will accompany you," said Roberts.

"Will you?" asked Jerome, who really longed to play and thus forget "The Love Nest."

"Do you mean 'can you?'" answered Phebe, scrambling to her feet.

Flora turned Elizabeth's chair to face the piano, and all sought comfortable seats. Jerome looked into his cabinet.

"'Somebody's been sleeping in my bed. Somebody's been eating my porridge.'"

"I had to find out whether she could play," confessed Roberts.

"Phebe can play," asserted Gertrude with a toss of her little head.

Jerome smiled, and began a Provençal dance, revived from antiquity; then he played a Handel minuet and the ballet music from "Rosamunde." He liked delicate, old-fashioned compositions, and he was pleased with Phebe's selection. There was no applause, and he seemed to expect none. Assured of deep enjoyment, his audience sat with arms folded or eyes hidden or gaze fixed upon the fire. He opened the Air for the G String on the rack.

As he played, Jerome studied his accompanist. She had seemed to him to be a live, glowing creature, but her playing was that of an unfailingly correct automaton. Her soul was with the printed music, but not with the music as it was conceived or played. He tried her with Chopin, but without improvement. However, an accurate accompanist was better than an inaccurate one, and a slavish abiding by the text better than too willful variations.

It was one o'clock when Jerome finally laid down his bow.

"Well?" he said at last.

Phebe rose and stood beside him speechless — there was no lack of feeling in her eyes.

"You know what we think of it," said Gertrude. "You oughtn't to have any compliments. Just playing like that is so much more than the rest of us have in life."

"It was the Metropolitan Opera Company and the Philharmonic Orchestra and a star concert, all rolled into one," said Miss Vermilye.

"Now that is surely a little extravagant," said Jerome.

"Will you do it again?" asked Flora.

"If Miss Stannard will accompany me."

"I'll accompany you any time," promised Phebe, finding

her voice. "*Ach!*" she cried, dropping into the vernacular of her youth. "If we could only have it always like sometimes!"

Ada Haldeman lifted her head. "What is that language you speak?"

"Pennsylvania English, Millerstown brand," explained Phebe gayly. "My native tongue."

"Millerstown," repeated Ada. "Do you know a Mr. Weidner?"

"An art-collecting Weidner?" said Roberts.

"No," said Ada, "just a plain Weidner!"

"You can't mean Ambrose Weidner!" Phebe's astonishment was so profound that it sounded like scorn. She would as soon have expected Sarah Ann or Vinnie to be inquired for in New York.

"That is whom I mean."

"Yes, I know him. Do you?"

"I went to school with him," explained Ada, raising her voice as though, in answer to Phebe's astonishment, she were defending him. "He was the best and most intelligent student in college."

Phebe followed her across the hall to Jerome's room where her cloak lay across the bed.

"Do you mean the Ambrose who is a preacher?"

"He expected to be a preacher." Ada buttoned her cloak under her chin, looking at Phebe steadily and in not quite so friendly a fashion. Jerome stood waiting, hat and stick in hand and Ada bade every one good-night.

"I think Ambrose is very good," said Phebe, a little puzzled as though she had somehow been put in the wrong. "I didn't know that he was very bright."

"He was very bright and very interesting," said Ada steadily and positively.

Phebe watched her go down the steps, wondering at her taste. But in another instant she forgot her. Again she laid her hand on her heart. She felt there the sharp edge of a letter. It was from Crusen, and he asked her to meet him on Saturday at Brentano's and go with him to lunch.

II

Crusen had read Phebe's letter sitting at his mahogany desk in his handsome apartment. He was greatly surprised to hear from her and also somewhat annoyed, and he determined to leave the letter unanswered; there were certain reasons why it was best to let his acquaintance with Millerstonians lapse. Moreover, he doubted whether Phebe would prove an interesting or desirable acquaintance. She was a village girl — above the average in intelligence, perhaps, but a village girl none the less, educated at a Normal School and a fresh-water college. Now she taught, and of all types of women the academic found least favor in Crusen's fastidious eyes. An aproned, chalk-stained schoolmistress of his childhood had established a norm which he had never corrected. Phebe had come, he supposed, for an economical, hard-won year in Columbia, but she would be none the less a school teacher.

Crusen looked a little older, but only a little. His thick, light hair had lost its brightness, but it showed no tint of gray and his flesh was firm. He had an air of prosperity — evidently the fees of a consulting metallurgist were large. His suite of three rooms was furnished with his own belongings, and there was nothing which was not and did not look costly.

He dropped Phebe's letter into the waste-paper basket, then, thinking better of his precipitancy, he lifted it out and read its brief sentences once more, pleased by their terseness.

He remembered Phebe's fine head and her bright speech, and especially her unresponsive hand; most women, Crusen thought, responded too promptly — they were like kittens who purred at a touch.

Looking down upon the stream of traffic in the avenue, and folding Phebe's letter into a fan, he decided at last that he would invite her to lunch with him. It was wholly impossible that she should be acting for any one but herself, and an hour's conversation with her would do no harm.

He invited her to meet him at Brentano's rather than at a restaurant or hotel because he was not sure of her manners or appearance. From Brentano's he could take her to any one of a number of comfortable and respectable places. He could make lunch as long or short as he pleased, and if she were provincial beyond endurance the luxury of a ride in a taxicab back to the district from which she came would compensate amply for a prompt dismissal. It was clear that he had made an impression upon her, but that was an old experience and one which imposed upon him no obligation.

Conscious of good health, satisfied with his success, and not altogether unaware of his good looks, he walked down the avenue in the glittering October noon, his rapid step and the clear air bringing a glow to his cheek. Others took note of his appearance, and, when he turned his eyes away from glittering equipages and windows filled with jewelry or furs or brilliant silks, he met pleasant glances.

With the advisability of an early lunch in view, he had set the hour of meeting for twelve. As he proceeded, he was increasingly amused at himself and less interested in his adventure. An adventure it was, and one he was coming to believe which presaged senility. At Twenty-Seventh Street he stood looking up and down the avenue. He ex-

pected to find Phebe outside the store and to know her by the country fashion of her clothes, but he saw only the types which he saw every day. Eyes continued to seek his, but they were not the eyes of Phebe. His recollection of her appearance grew more indistinct — if she did not remember him, they might not find each other. It was not until he had waited for two stupid and irritable minutes that he looked into the store. There, at once, he realized that his anxiety was wasted.

Phebe stood before a counter on which translations of Russian books were displayed. Her somewhat square shoulders and her thick braid of hair were unmistakable, as were the set of her head and the curve of a brilliant cheek. She wore a rough, light gray suit with a gray-blue scarf and hat, and there was something of the boy about her in the charming period when the awkwardness of adolescence is past and manhood not yet begun. She carried a gray handbag, made of the material of her dress, with an enameled clasp the color of her scarf — clearly it was not by mere chance that she presented an artistic and finished appearance. Watching her, Crusen was moved by an emotion which was more than mere admiration for her good looks; she seemed to him to be something abiding and solid in a shifting world.

"She finds a becoming style and sticks to it," he said to himself. "That takes a stable creature."

Phebe felt him approaching, but that was not especially significant because she had felt him approaching a dozen times. She came often to Brentano's where she was acquainted with a clerk, Miss LaMotte, a friend of the Dennis sisters. Miss LaMotte knew the Merediths and Thomsons apart and did not bring "Lucile" to a customer who asked for "The Woods of Westermain," or "The Seasons" in place of "A Sunday up the River." Phebe always stopped to talk

to her, and this morning she had been talking for ten minutes with shining eyes and many backward glances.

When, turning for the fifteenth time, she saw Crusen, she grew suddenly cold — joy was harder to bear than disappointment; she was accustomed to disappointment, and joy was new. But in an instant the brilliant color flamed again in her cheek and she held out her hand to Crusen and at the same time completed her sentence to Miss LaMotte.

"I'll come in next week." A queen could have done no better.

"How are you?" said Crusen.

"I'm very well. I hope you are also."

"Yes," said Crusen. "Have you finished your business here?"

"Almost. The rest can wait."

"If you haven't, I'll order a table for lunch while you finish. Have you a preference as to place? Will the Savoy suit you?"

Phebe caught her breath; she had looked at the Savoy from without.

"Yes, thank you."

"Would you prefer to walk or ride?"

"I'd rather walk."

"Then I'll say one o'clock. Shall you be hungry then?"

"I always am."

Crusen sought a telephone, and Miss LaMotte returned.

"Is there anything else, Miss Stannard?"

"I can't remember anything," answered Phebe helplessly.

Together Crusen and Phebe went up the avenue, their steps matching. Crusen looked at Phebe keenly, and Phebe looked down, praying that she might not seem too stupid or too happy.

"So you're going to school again?"

"Yes, but I'm fortunate in having Saturday entirely free. I have no work from Friday at noon till Monday at noon. There's a girl who sits beside me who has to come all the way from Short Hills for one class at twelve o'clock on Saturday."

"We'll have time to look in some of the windows, if you wish."

"I always stop at the bookstores."

"What are you studying?"

"I'm registered for a master's degree in Comparative Literature, looking forward to a doctor's degree."

"Work seems to agree with you."

"It does."

"And life in general, also."

"Yes. You have the same sort of look." Phebe gave him a fleeting glance. "When I saw you the last time —"

"When was that?"

"On September 6, five years ago."

"Is it so long?"

"It is. When I saw you then you were expecting some great good fortune. Did it come true?"

Crusen hesitated, and the frown which had darkened his eyes at sight of Phebe's unexpected letter came back. How much had he told of his expected good fortune?

"Yes," he said at last. "It came true."

"I thought so. You look fortunate and happy."

"That was seeing you," said Crusen.

Phebe laughed. "Tell me honestly, didn't you feel as though you were coming on rather an uncertain errand?"

"Not in the least," answered Crusen promptly. "Did you?"

Phebe approached the window of a store. "I was frightened to death. — There's the beautiful New York edition!"

"Of what?"

"Of the works of Henry James."

"What a high-brow you are!"

"You should see a real high-brow!"

Crusen found his table by the window and established his companion. The eyes of the dining-room were upon her, but he watched in vain for a sign of self-consciousness or embarrassment. She expressed no surprise at the bouquet of cornflowers which lay beside her plate, but lifted them and pinned them to her dress, saying, "What magic matched my hat?" She behaved as though she came to the Savoy daily.

"How long have you been in New York?" asked Crusen.

"I came the third week in September and this is the third week in October. Is my provincialism still glaring?"

"Your sophistication is complete."

"Perhaps it's too complete, and you can tell that it's put on."

"No, not that either."

"Then I'm to believe that I'm exactly right?"

"Exactly."

Phebe laughed. She was determined to be circumspect, to seem indifferent.

"What will you have to eat?" asked Crusen. "Will you be content with my choice?"

"I like anything," said Phebe.

Crusen wrote his order and leaned forward, his arms on the table. People were still looking at Phebe; he could see them in the mirror behind her.

"Now give me your history since that September day — the sixth, you say it was?"

"That's not difficult," answered Phebe. "I went back to college and graduated. I taught for three years and paid three summer visits to Millerstown. Last March my father died and I gave up my position and came here."

"Is that all that has happened to you?"

"All," said Phebe brightly. She felt again the sensation of chill which came when she remembered Vinnie Most and Miss Preston and Miss McGrath.

"You've surely made many friends?"

"I've made one, Gertrude Dennis, the librarian of Granger College, now in the New York Public Library."

"And now you live in New York?"

"Yes. My father left me enough to yield me more income than I ever dreamed of having."

"You're independent of all aunts and uncles?"

"Yes."

"With whom do you live?"

"I live with Gertrude Dennis's aunts. They own a large old house; their names are Margaret and Flora and Elizabeth and Irene and Mary." Phebe gave a friendly sketch of each. She told also about the boarders and the party and Eileen.

"And you like this life?"

"Yes."

"And these people?"

"Yes," said Phebe stoutly. "They have ideas."

"I suppose you've begun to see the city?"

"You might call it beginning."

Crusen helped Phebe to a second chop.

"When I come back we'll do some sight-seeing."

Phebe's heart beat like a steam-hammer. But she must not let either Crusen or Fate know that she was wild with joy.

"Are you going away?"

"I'm going to Iron Mountain, Michigan, to-morrow, to be gone about six weeks. When I come back we'll see what sight-seeing you've done and what remains. There are a

number of places I've wanted to visit for a long time, the Brooklyn Museum and the Hispanic Museum and various scientific collections."

"That will be interesting," said Phebe.

"You'll like to go?" said Crusen, a little piqued.

"Yes, indeed," said Phebe, not too eagerly.

Crusen had wondered what he would do with his guest when lunch was over, but he found getting rid of her easier than he liked. When he had finished his cigarette, she said that she had an engagement at half-past four.

"Is it uptown?"

"It's at the Public Library."

"All your rendezvous seem to be in libraries."

"They are."

"Would you like to have a ride before then?"

"Yes, on the top of a bus."

"You wouldn't rather have a taxi?"

"By no means."

"We'll go uptown. I'll show you the windows of my rooms," offered Crusen, who a few days ago had been uneasy because Phebe had his address.

Phebe climbed the steps of the moving car. Her heel touched Crusen's shoulder and he felt suddenly an access of youth and rejoiced in the lightness of his bonds. That was the way for a man to be comfortable — with friends, but with no entanglements to prevent the making of new friends.

"There's where I live, the corner rooms on the sixth floor."

"Your dreams must have come true," said Phebe, looking up. "That's rather different from the Millerstown Hotel."

The frowning intentness came back into Crusen's eyes. He felt misgivings again about this encounter, but they were fleeting and he and Phebe compared their knowledge of the avenue.

"I've talked all the time," said Phebe at last, on the steps of the library.

"Next time I'll take my turn," said Crusen.

Phebe held out her hand. "It's been very pleasant to see you again."

"Has it?" said Crusen.

"Good-bye," said Phebe.

"Good-bye," said he.

In the lobby Phebe stood still, trembling. The touch of his hand was still warm against her palm, the odor of his cigarette was in her clothing, the recollection of his keen eyes in her heart. With what earnestness they had studied her, with what pleasure they had regarded her, she did not suspect.

She should have known better than to walk at once into Gertrude's office. Gertrude glanced up, saying, "That you, Phebe?" — then she looked at Phebe through her spectacles, and over her spectacles, and finally without her spectacles. "What has happened to you?"

"Nothing at all," said Phebe. "It's the glorious day." She spoke unsteadily, and as she approached Gertrude she walked unsteadily. She turned toward the window and Gertrude looked at her back, at her lifted head, at the tips of her ears which seemed to be blushing. Of her thousand quotations one floated to the level of her consciousness:

"Oh! ever thus from childhood's hour,
I've seen my fondest hopes decay;
I never loved a tree or flower,
But 'twas the first to fade away.
I never nursed a dear gazelle,
To glad me with its soft black eye,
But when it came to know me well,
And love me, it was sure to die."

Gertrude's heart sank; she continued to look at Phebe's back.

"I wonder who he is," she speculated. "And where she found him in the desert of Granger College. Or has she picked him up here?"

III

PHEBE came to breakfast promptly on Thanksgiving morning and found herself almost alone. Since her early days at Granger she had not missed breakfast and lying abed was a punishment. She meant to spend the morning walking, either alone or with Gertrude. But Gertrude did not appear.

The last month had been, she believed, the happiest of her life. It was necessary for her to exert all her will power to keep her attention upon her work, but when work was done she spent the remainder of the day and a part of the night in delicious dreaming. She had a look of happy anticipation which had in it something which was too intense. But now her period of happiness was over — Crusen had not communicated with her. This meeting was like the others, merely a casual encounter.

She had relieved her impatience by fresh explorations, through pleasant residence sections, to parks once green and lovely, now the gray haunt of grimy sparrows, through miles of streets where all the signs were foreign. She visited the Cooper Union, the Bowery and the Ghetto, imagining herself here with Crusen in the evening when flaming torches lighted up the dark faces of the pushcart venders and their thronging patrons. From the bridges she looked at the river with its skimming craft and at the crowded mass of buildings, saying, "I shall stand here when it will be lighted like fairyland and he will be with me." She was saving the lower

section of the city until Crusen should come, and she made a foolish excuse when Gertrude wished to take her to see Fraunce's Tavern.

She played as she walked an old and childish game; she said to herself, "When I get home, I shall have a letter, a card, some word." She tried to picture the mines at Iron Mountain, the thousands of cars, the hundreds of boats, the creaking cranes, the vast piles of ore and waste. Surely he would send her a picture postcard! But he sent nothing.

This morning she found beside her plate a letter from Beulah. Beulah said that Vinnie Most's rheumatism was very bad and that it was hard to say just what she would do. The neighbors and friends looked after her and Mrs. Berger had sent a present of a hundred dollars. Beulah's shelves were laden as never before — she had a hundred jars of fruit, two hundred of vegetables, and fifty of pickles, ten quarts of dried corn, forty bottles of raspberry vinegar and grape juice, and two hundred glasses of jellies and preserves. Beulah said that she was prepared for winter. William and Aunt Rosie and the three little boys were well, and Beulah hoped that till spring, if they were lucky, they would have a little girl — Catherine Phebe would be its name.

Ambrose Weidner, Beulah had heard from Sarah Ann, had given up his grand church in Philadelphia and was going to New York. It was wonderful — Phebe could hear Beulah say "won-der-ful'" — how well Ambrose had done. No doubt he was going to have a larger church than he had in Philadelphia.

"Perhaps you will sometime meet him," wrote Beulah. "Oh, my! Phebe, our new preacher he is a weak brother! He says all the time, 'Shall we sing?' 'Shall we have a word of prayer?' It is a wicked thought, Phebe, but I would like to say sometime out loud, 'No, don't let us—let us have once a good sermon.'"

Beulah signed herself according to an old formula, "Your true friend, Sister Neuweiler," and added below, "Tear this up — I wouldn't want the new preacher to see it."

But to news and to humor, whether conscious or unconscious, Phebe was dull. She read rapidly and indifferently and tucked the letter in her belt. She would send Vinnie a present, either money or a warm, comfort-giving robe. She smiled at Beulah's naïve idea that she and Ambrose might meet. If Beulah ever stopped having babies, she would persuade her to visit New York and be dazzled.

Still Gertrude did not appear and Phebe poured a cup of coffee to carry to her. As she passed through the hall, the maid was taking a yellow envelope from a messenger boy. Phebe glanced at him and passed on; she would receive a telegram from no one but the Heimbachs and she had just heard of their welfare. But the maid said, "This is for you, Miss Stannard," and handed her the envelope. The address was very plainly typewritten:

Miss Phebe Stannard,
16 N. Washington Square,
New York.

Phebe's hand shook. Was it Beulah — had some dreadful mishap befallen her? Or Uncle Heimbach?

"Shall I take the coffee to Miss Gertrude?" asked the maid solicitously. "I hope there's nothing wrong."

Phebe handed over the cup and tore open the end of the envelope and saw the signature, "A. C." "No!" she answered the maid joyfully. "Oh, no, there's nothing wrong." In a chair by the parlor window she read slowly, as a child might read his first paragraph.

Shall be in New York Thanksgiving can you meet me seven waiting room Pennsylvania Station dine shall wait till seven thirty.

A. C.

Phebe sat perfectly still until the housemaid came to the door.

"It's all right, Miss Stannard?"

"Yes," said Phebe huskily. "Everything's all right."

She did not seek Gertrude, but stole through the halls to her own room and got her hat and coat and crept downstairs and out the door, and flew westward and turned into Macdougal Street and stood still to get her breath. It was not yet ten o'clock — she had hours until dinner at one and then hours and hours until evening. Here in this neighborhood were little streets she had often meant to look up, quaint relics of the past, forgotten behind high houses, Patchin Place, Milligan Court — she would find them now. She stood looking at the tiny dilapidated houses, the poor ailanthus trees, the dead wistarias, as though together they made an enchanting picture.

She came at last, for all her delicious postponement, to the Pennsylvania Station and went in and selected the spot where she would sit and wait for Crusen; then she walked home so slowly that she arrived only in time for dinner. Her housemates expected her to redeem the feast from its usual solemnity and she did not disappoint them. Gertrude listened to her with pride, letting herself believe happily that after all New York and New York alone was Phebe's wine.

Escaping from Gertrude with difficulty, she entered the station again at a quarter to seven. She wore her gray suit and her blue scarf and her soft crushed hat of blue velvet and carried her gray bag. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes like stars, and her expression was that of a child who knows that somewhere in the room, behind a chair or under the cushions, candy is hidden. Her lips formed themselves so irresistibly into a smile that she had to keep them consciously in order. She smiled because the air outside was cold and

invigorating and because the air in the arcade was warm and relaxing.

When she reached the steps leading into the main waiting-room, she ran lightly down. She would like to linger here watching each entrance, but Crusen, she thought, would expect to find her seated and not pacing the floor. She allowed herself a single searching glance, then she went on sedately to the seat she had selected and again composed her smiling face into soberness.

Two women sitting near by watched her.

"What an attractive girl!" said one.

Her older companion agreed. "Yes — not beautiful but wholesome, cheerful, energetic. Everybody ought to look like that. How old should you say she was?"

"She's near thirty."

"Never!"

"Well, she has the art of dressing herself becomingly, twenty or thirty."

"She sits modestly," said the older woman sharply. "I suppose she's waiting for a man." She saw Crusen coming and forgot Phebe. In her eyes there was the same hunger that often darkened Phebe's eyes. She saw Crusen's prosperity, his keenness, his air of the world, and envied both him and Phebe.

"She's wholesome and cheerful and almost beautiful," she said to herself, "and has a lover besides, and he has probably been loved by many women and is now poaching in the preserves of youth."

The women could hear Crusen's greeting.

"I'm a minute late. I'll attend to my reservations, then I'll be free till train time."

"Very well," said Phebe.

The older woman rose as though she could no longer en-

dure the proximity of this good fortune, and her companion followed, saying, "No romance there — she's his sister."

"His sister! What nonsense!"

"They're both blond and they're alike in other ways. Certainly no man would address his sweetheart like that! It was like beginning a letter without a salutation."

"Have you never had a letter without a salutation?"

"Of course not!"

"You haven't had much experience."

"I! I'd like to know what you mean!" The two passed on, their voices rising.

The twenty minutes before Crusen returned were minutes of bliss to Phebe. She would have liked to prolong them — to wait an hour, or two hours, if she did not thereby lose more precious time. Returning he sat down. Her hand lay on the arm of the seat, he laid his own upon it.

"It's half-past seven — we have two hours. You are most kind to come at such short notice. Let us go in."

In the most distant corner of the dining-room there was a table with the chairs tilted forward. At it obsequious waiters seated Phebe, and opposite her Crusen folded his arms.

"We can take our time. I'll put you in a taxi before I go. I got in at four this afternoon, attended to my mail, and now I'm off again. It was fearfully cold and unpleasant in the West and I had a hard problem."

"You solved it?"

"Yes."

"Are you tired?"

"I rested on the train, and I shall have a chance to rest still more."

Phebe was about to say, "Where?"—but the waiter could no longer be ignored.

"You've had your Thanksgiving turkey?" asked Crusen.

"I didn't eat very much. I thought you wouldn't have had yours."

"That was considerate." Crusen wrote down the order. "Can you eat mince pie at this hour?"

"I can eat anything at any hour."

Crusen went on talking about the hardships of his journey, his eyes on Phebe's face. While he was away he had laughed at his impressions, but here she was, substantial and sympathetic. He had long ago ceased to talk to women about his work, having realized that their interest was pretense. But Phebe had knowledge and understanding. His words overflowed; he described in detail all that he had done. He felt a sense of proprietorship in Phebe as though he had lifted her from the pit of Millerstown. He wondered how many lovers she had had and disapproved instantly of her independence.

"Are your teachers interesting?" he asked.

"They know their subjects," said Phebe easily. "One is very old, almost senile, and two are children, and the other two are middle-aged. One doesn't think of them as men, but as teachers."

"What have you been doing since October?"

"I've been to class, and I've walked miles and miles." Blushing she remembered how much of her time had been spent in thoughts of him. "I've attended two concerts with Gertrude, and I've practiced with Mr. Jerome."

"Did you tell me about Jerome?"

"Yes, and about Mr. Roberts and about Valentine Levering. Mr. Jerome is the violinist."

"Is he young?"

"About fifty. So is Mr. Roberts."

"And Levering?"

Phebe laughed. "That beautiful creature? In years he's

just as old as I, but in reality he's about sixteen. I told you about him and his plays and his pursuing lady-love, Miss Daub, whose father makes cocoa butter. She wants him *mit* — I wish you understood Pennsylvania German!"

"I do, a little."

"I had a Sunday School class," said Phebe, smiling. "In it were three Kostenbader children — you remember the Kostenbaders? — they lived in Furnace Row."

"Yes."

"One day they were absent, and Mrs. Kostenbader explained that they had no umbrella. 'They wanted to go,' she said. 'They wanted to go *mit teufelsgewalt.*' That's the way Eileen wants Valentine."

"She'll get him," prophesied Crusen.

"Perhaps you'd like to hear the items from Millerstown," said Phebe when her portion of turkey was on her plate. "Poor Vinnie Most is sick, and there's a new preacher, a very weak brother, our Beulah says. Ambrose Weidner has left his place in Philadelphia and has come to New York." Suddenly a red tide flooded Phebe's cheeks. "I spoke to you unkindly once about Ambrose. I'm sorry."

"Have you seen him in New York?" asked Crusen.

"No," said Phebe. "Nor ever shall, though Beulah expects us to meet daily. I've been past the Weidner house several times. They say the vein is much deeper than they expected."

"Is it?" said Crusen. His voice was careless, but his eyes were sharp and bright. "What was the dreadful thing you said about Weidner?"

"I laughed at his clothes and his hair and his poverty and his awkwardness. It was horrid."

"He was awkward, as I remember him, and his aspirations were funny."

"But I shouldn't have laughed," insisted Phebe. "He's one of those persons who are good and pious and admirable, but for whom one has an immeasurable but unconquerable aversion."

"Perhaps it's his profession," said Crusen carelessly. "It's a little presuming to set one's self up to instruct mankind."

The apprehension in his eyes gave place to security, but in a few minutes he suffered another sort of apprehension. He looked at Phebe and felt again the growing fear of old age, of physical degeneration, of loneliness and weakness. He understood now how maturity takes pleasure in the freshness, even the physical freshness, of youth. Normally it is the youth of one's children, to Crusen it was of necessity the freshness of a young love. What a disaster it would be if this heart were preëmpted! His eyes lifted suddenly to Phebe's head and shoulders and thence to her eyes. He met them squarely.

"Where are you going?" asked Phebe.

"To-night? I'm going to England."

Phebe's cheek blanched.

"Oh, are you?" she said.

Crusen looked at her amazed, then exultant, then curious. She had had, he guessed suddenly, no lovers.

"I sail from Boston in the morning, the only way I could get passage," he explained. "I'll be back by New Year. After that I'll be in New York for two months at least. Then we're going to see the city. Suppose we have a regular engagement each Saturday or Sunday afternoon. You meet me as early as you can and lunch with me; then we'll set forth. Will you do that?"

"Yes."

"It's almost nine o'clock," said Crusen. "I can have my sleeping-car ticket exchanged for my check before I put you into your taxi."

Phebe dipped her fingers into her bowl and brushed her lips and made no answer.

"You won't forget me?" said Crusen as he held her coat.

Still Phebe did not answer. The exchanging of Crusen's ticket consumed but a moment, then they stood in the driveway waiting for a chauffeur to answer the whistle of the starter.

"Wouldn't you like me really to see you on the train?" asked Phebe. "You're going so far!"

Crusen looked into her gray eyes. They told him frankly all her admiration and all her grief at parting.

"You'll come back and get right into a taxicab and go home?"

"Yes."

Crusen slipped his hand into Phebe's arm and held her close to his side. The gate-tender allowed her to go down the steps into the cool, brilliant cave beneath. The train was an express from Philadelphia to Boston; it was, they heard gratefully, ten minutes late. They stood arm in arm while Crusen described the construction of the prodigious vault until the train drowned his voice.

"You must go now," said he. But he held Phebe still closer.

"To-morrow at this time you'll be far out at sea." Phebe spoke as though he were to cross the Atlantic in a shallop.

"Yes," he said. He looked at her red lips and laid his arm across her shoulders. The windows of the sleepers were blank, the few employees who lingered near did not look in his direction. With his right hand he tipped back Phebe's chin and kissed her lightly on her fresh lips.

"Go quickly, my dear."

Phebe obeyed without another glance, and he watched her climb the steps, her hand on the rail. He saw that she went

unsteadily. In the car he bent his head, reflecting profoundly. No woman whom he admired had ever refused her love, but before him, he believed, was an intimacy richer and happier than he had ever had. He did not see why it should not last for years to come, adding fuel to that which must begin to be ere long a sinking flame.

IV

Phebe and Crusen stood together in one of the alcoves in Tolstoi's store. It was four o'clock one Saturday afternoon in February; the glittering lights were lighted and there were many customers. Since Crusen's return from England, Phebe had often gone uptown to meet him, but this was the first time he had come down to meet her. He had not kissed her again — there was no opportunity in museums or in historic buildings unless one wished to behave with shocking impropriety.

On these excursions she walked beside him, straight as a tree, not a single motion betraying the tumult of her heart. She found that he liked to be informed about the exhibits, and she prepared herself to recount the history of the Tomb of Perneb and the MacMonnies Bacchante and the Rospigliosi coupé. She gave him a discourse on armor, and one on lace, and another on jade, having applied herself diligently to descriptive catalogues.

He proposed no concerts, but twice he took her to matinées. One play was called "The Unknown Purple" and the other "Tiger, Tiger," and both had shocked Phebe. Crusen laughed, but he liked her lack of sophistication. He was always careful to return her to Washington Square early in the evening and thus to maintain the impression of her housemates that she spent the time away from them with University acquaintances, supposedly women.

Crusen had not selected this trysting-place. He did not like old books or old bookstores, and he did not care to meet Phebe's associates. He made her promise to return uptown with him for dinner, and he meant to suggest that she go uptown to live. He did not wish her to expect an offer of marriage, and he believed that the mention of an uptown residence for herself alone would make clear to her several things which he found it difficult to say.

Phebe was now well acquainted with Tolstoi. She often made his store the goal of her walk and listened to his humorous complaints and walked home with whoever came for Elizabeth. She knew that his parents had been the victims of a pogrom; that he had been brought to America by refugees to live with an uncle who was a scholar and bookseller; that his uncle was dead, and that the business, greatly enlarged, belonged to him. He was bound to his chair, except for a few halting steps, by a tubercular affection of the spine which had made him almost helpless before its course was stayed. Where he lived neither Elizabeth Dennis nor any of his other employees knew. He was in the store when they came, he remained when they left. A boy accompanied him to sales and auctions, pushing his chair, or helping him in and out of a cab. Most of the day he sat beside his desk, dictating and scolding pleasantly. He wore soft shirts and loosely knotted ties, and he gesticulated constantly with his fine hands.

Here Phebe had met Ada Haldeman, but Ada seemed only to have dropped in for a moment or to be just on the point of leaving. Phebe was determined to make her friendly; she stopped her and told her that she had heard that Ambrose was in New York, but "Indeed!" was all Ada said in answer.

She had glimpses of much greater celebrities. Hither came poets and prose-writers, novelists and essayists; some

who did poor work and were famous, others who did good work and were almost unknown; and a few who were both worthy and famous. They glanced over the changing piles on the tables and spent long periods in the alcoves, and all stopped for a word with Tolstoi.

Standing in the alcove which was her favorite resort, Phebe talked enthusiastically to Crusen.

"In an hour you'll hear every sort of book in the world asked for — dramatic literature, theological, medical, musical, and books in all languages. He knows everything. The other day I heard him discussing a Hebrew book."

"That he should certainly be able to do," said Crusen, who was not in the least interested in Tolstoi.

"Of course!" laughed Phebe. "How stupid of me!" She was always happy, always good-natured.

"Is this untidy place ever cleared up?" Crusen asked in disgust. "These dusty, spidery heaps on the floor, for instance?"

"They're not dusty or spidery, either," explained Phebe. "They're entirely new every few days. Books come and go by the thousands."

"Would you like any of these germ-laden volumes?"

"Books are proof against germs," declared Phebe. "I'd like you to buy me something — anything. There's 'The Romany Rye' in good print. I'd like to have that. Uptown you spend ten dollars on me, and here you can get a valuable article for one."

"I'd rather spend the ten."

"You're a sort of Crœsus," laughed Phebe. "Is there anything you want that you haven't got?"

"Yes," said Crusen. "I have one very distinct wish that hasn't been satisfied."

Phebe looked up — her eyes adored, but were as yet innocent. "Can I get you what you want?"

"You're a sweet child," answered Crusen. He took the book in one hand and her arm in the other. "Where shall we go to dinner? Some place where there are no old books and where we can talk comfortably."

Phebe laughed again — she was perfectly willing to be teased about her passion for books. "You like stylish places; let's go to the Savoy where you took me first of all."

"Very well."

But neither moved. Against the back of Crusen's hand beat Phebe's heart and its throbbing quickened his own pulse. It was a moment which he tasted with deliberation and full consciousness, and one which gave Phebe a thrill of almost intolerable happiness. As she stood close to him, she could look between two rows of books into the next alcove and there she saw the head and shoulders of a tall man. A fleeting glance was all she had, for the stranger helped himself to a book, clicked out the light, and went his way. She believed him to be Ambrose Weidner, but the possibility flashed into her consciousness and out, creating as little impression as the flight of a single robin in June. She had no interest in anything but Crusen and her own sensations; even if Beulah had appeared, she would have looked at her vaguely.

Crusen took her scarf and wrapped it round her throat. She stood passively and she spoke like a child.

"Has it occurred to you that I'm very fond of you?"

Crusen laughed. "What a question!"

"Has it?" reiterated Phebe.

"Don't you want to know whether I'm fond of you?"

"That isn't the important thing."

Crusen laughed again, then he went to pay for his purchase and Phebe stopped by Tolstoi's chair. Tolstoi's wise eyes followed Crusen; he liked Phebe, and he often said to him-

self that if he had a daughter he would wish her to be as erect and well-made and clear-eyed, but he did not like this friend of Phebe's. Then he shrugged his shoulders — love was as easily taught wisdom as the sea-tides were stayed.

As Phebe lingered, still quivering with delight, she remembered the tall, half-seen figure.

"Have you a customer named Weidner?" she asked. "A clergyman?"

"Yes. Miss Haldeman brought him here. He's back there somewhere now. Do you know him?"

"We come from the same place."

"He's a smart man," said Tolstoi. "He knows literature in many branches."

"Does he?" Astonished, Phebe looked toward the back of the store. Perhaps it would be interesting to see Ambrose again as the friend of Miss Haldeman and a clever man. An acquaintance with literature in all its branches was not part of the usual equipment of a minister. But Crusen approached, and she forgot Ambrose.

"I sent your ancient volume by parcel post," said he. Without looking at Tolstoi, who continued to regard him gravely, he opened the door and followed Phebe out. "You seem abstracted," he said, taking her arm.

Phebe slipped her hand into the hand which awaited it. She was trying to remember what she had been talking about with Tolstoi, but she gave it up, and with a happy smile let herself be guided down the Subway steps.

As they finished their dessert, Crusen announced that he was going away for a month. He watched Phebe's face fall and her eyes darken.

"Shall you miss me?"

Phebe bent her head. "You know the answer to that," she said with sharp unhappiness.

Crusen looked at her intently. There was a certain path, worn by the feet of many women; he wondered whether Phebe like many would find it without assistance.

"I don't want to go home," said Phebe, believing that she made her plaint sound like mere pretense.

"Would you like to stay with me?" asked Crusen lightly.

Phebe was a little frightened; the blood left her face and her cheeks pricked.

"I don't know where you'd put me in your monastery," she said.

Crusen laughed. He had forgotten to show Phebe the desirability of leaving her present habitation, but he had sowed seed which might of itself bear the same fruit. He called a taxi, gave the chauffeur most explicit directions, and said good-bye. He gave Phebe neither directions of any sort, nor an affectionate farewell, but he stood looking after her. He did not believe that even his first love had so pleased him.

V

Turning suddenly into Seventh Avenue, her eyes seeking the Greenwich Village Theater for the name of the current play, Phebe met the same tall figure which had vanished mysteriously into the back of Tolstoi's store. It was early April and a snowy unseasonable afternoon, and the two pedestrians, traveling rapidly head down, butted into each other. Being young and good-tempered, they laughed, looked up, and met each other's eyes.

"Why, Ambrose!" cried Phebe. Forgetting her dislike and remembering only that Ambrose came from Millerstown, she looked at him with kindly directness. His pleasant eyes smiled at her through his glasses.

"Good-afternoon," said he, taking her outstretched hand. His grasp was short and firm and there was an air of mental

alertness and self-containment about him. One would have assigned him to a profession which connected him with books, but which did not keep him out of the fresh air.

"I thought I saw you some weeks ago in Tolstoi's store," said Phebe, stepping out of the way of pedestrians.

"I go there frequently."

"He thinks you're very learned. Are you?"

"Not in the least."

"Beulah told me you had come to New York. Is your church near here?"

"It's on Cameron Street, about twenty minutes' walk from here, down Seventh Avenue, then down Varick Street."

Phebe remembered her guide-book. "Not St. Matthew's with the tall spire and the fine organ! You must be a famous preacher!"

"Exactly the contrary," said Ambrose. "The congregation has moved away, but services must be held to retain the property. They wouldn't put a famous man opposite empty pews."

"Surely you preach to somebody!"

"My congregation has increased a thousand per cent since I came. At first there were only five, now there are fifty."

"I thought you had a large church in Philadelphia."

"I did."

"And you aren't there now?"

"No. I'm here."

Phebe tried to remember Ambrose's sermon at Millerstown — perhaps he was a poor preacher. Suddenly she blushed; she had no desire to catechise him — she liked him too little. She would say good-bye. But when she paused, Ambrose began to ask questions.

"You still play the organ?"

"Alas, organs aren't part of the furniture of boarding-houses."

"Would you like to play mine?"

"Now?" Phebe's eyes gleamed; she forgot Ambrose's inferiority and his piety and his presumptuous ambition.

"Yes. I'm on my way to my study and you may come with me."

Phebe clasped her hands.

"I should love it!" She began to walk briskly southward and Ambrose fell into step. "I read about the organ in 'Historic New York.'" She looked at Ambrose directly and found him looking at her. Something in his glance made her unhappy; it seemed to speak of indefectible content which was not hers. She thought of him with unwilling curiosity until she remembered the organ. "It will be like water to a thirsty traveler."

"This neighborhood used to be much more interesting than it is now," said Ambrose. "In a minute you'll have one of the finest views of the Woolworth Building. Have you ever walked down Varick Street?"

"No," said Phebe. "But I've walked down everywhere else."

"There it is. Stop a minute." The two went close to the curb. Far away at the end of the broad street rose the slim tower, dim and fairylike against the snowy sky. "The tower of old St. John's used to set it off, but that's gone. I expected to see both, and I stood here open-mouthed, wondering what had happened."

St. Matthew's and its surroundings had fallen on evil times. The tall narrow houses had been converted into apartments, fire-escapes laced their fronts, and drying wash fluttered hundreds of grimy pennons in the air. The old church, which had beauty of line, but none of ornament, was most grimy of all. Ambrose led the way to a door at the rear.

"We can't sell the church or the ground," he explained. "If preaching ceases on this identical spot, the property reverts to distant heirs of the donor. A mission is impossible; the present settlers in the neighborhood are Italians who are devoted to their church and who have a fiery priest."

He opened a door and invited Phebe to step in. At the end of a narrow passage he opened another door into a large low room with paneled walls and groined ceiling. Above the bookshelves hung portraits of ancient and modern ecclesiastics. In the grate smouldered the remnants of a fire and on the desk by the window stood a bowl of hyacinths. The room was in perfect order, as though a woman's hand had touched it within a few hours.

"This is my study."

"What a lovely place!"

"It is a lovely place. You'd better leave your coat and hat here before the fire."

Ambrose did not invite Phebe to linger, but approached a door on the other side. He led her into the church and through the passage by which he entered the pulpit, down the long aisle, and up into the organ loft. There he unlocked the organ and turned back the lid, lighted a gas heater, and enfolded the bench and Phebe and the gas heater in a high screen.

"There's heat in the church, but not enough to keep you warm. You'll find all the music you care to play this afternoon, I fancy, in that cabinet."

Phebe's hand was on the switch — all that she asked was to be left alone, and this wish was promptly granted. The organ at Leesburg was custom-made, the specifications for that at Granger, prescribed by Bland, provided an excess of brass, but this organ was mellow perfection. Phebe began to play as one might taste wine with a sip.

At five o'clock Ambrose looked over the screen.

"You've played for more than two hours. Isn't it time to stop?"

"Have I bothered you?"

"No, indeed. Come and have some coffee. You must be tired."

"I am," said Phebe. "And happy." She got down a little stiffly. "Coffee — what a welcome sound!"

As she followed Ambrose, she remembered his uncouth manners. But there was nothing uncouth about him now; he had the ease of one accustomed to even more distinguished society than that of Phebe Stannard. As he drew up a chair to the fireplace, a stout woman with a white apron entered with a tray. He placed a little table before Phebe and the woman put the tray upon it.

"This is Mrs. Kurtz, Miss Stannard. She is a great-granddaughter of the first pastor of this congregation."

"That's right," said Mrs. Kurtz with her great-grandfather's accent. "I heard you play. It was beautiful."

"If I'm not here and you'll ring the bell, Mrs. Kurtz will let you in at any time," invited Ambrose. "I hope you'll feel free to come. As an expert in organs you know you're benefiting us."

Phebe poured the coffee and Ambrose took his cup. Then she looked round at the books and down at the fire and finally up at her host who stood with his shoulder against the mantel. She would not let herself acknowledge that he was interesting and attractive.

"Did you know that I was in New York?" she asked.

"Your cousin told me."

"I've met an acquaintance of yours, Miss Haldeman." In spite of herself Phebe's curiosity sharpened.

Ambrose answered calmly. "I knew her in college. She's

an inspiring sort of person." The subject of Miss Haldeman seemed to be closed.

"Are these books all yours?"

"No, not more than half."

"That's a good many." Phebe set down her cup. "I've had a beautiful time."

"You may have it again whenever you like."

Phebe flushed — it was strange to be accepting favors from Ambrose. He helped her on with her wraps and put on his own hat and coat.

"Let me walk home with you."

"Do you know where I live?"

"Your cousin told me that, too."

Phebe remembered how Beulah looked proudly at her kingdom and then pityingly at her — surely Beulah could have no mad matchmaking designs!

"There's another former Millerstonian in New York," she said quickly. "Mr. Crusen, who used to be at the furnace."

Ambrose opened the outer door. The snow still fell in large flakes. His failure to answer irritated and confused Phebe.

"I saw him talking to you on the station platform at Reading, and he says he lent you books."

Ambrose still said nothing.

"He did lend you books, didn't he?" persisted Phebe.

"He gave me books," corrected Ambrose.

Phebe would have liked to say, "Don't you admire him?" — but Ambrose gave her no chance.

"I'm going to point out some historic places," he said pleasantly. "Did you know that Poe composed 'The Raven' as he wandered round in a graveyard near here?"

"No," said Phebe.

"And 'Ligeia' and 'The Fall of the House of Usher' within a few minutes' walk of where you live?"

"No," said Phebe.

"Or that Tom Paine died at 59 Grove Street?" Ambrose smiled at her quizzically.

"Again no," said Phebe, her composure restored.

"And Aaron Burr —"

"Yes," said Phebe. "I know all about Aaron."

At the Dennis house she was conscious that it was rude not to ask Ambrose in. The evening was dreary, and he was certain to enjoy the company of the Dennises and their lodgers. But she did not yield to the kindly impulse. Her brief friendliness faded; she felt again that he and all his principles were inimical to her dearest longing. He was religion incarnate, and she wanted Crusen's kiss and his arms about her and not religion. She thanked Ambrose and said good-bye.

VI

PHEBE and Crusen sat on a fixed seat outside the cabin door of a ferry, looking ahead into the dusk, their hands laced together. They had visited the City Hall and the Woolworth Tower, and glanced into Trinity Church and grimy St. Paul's, and dined at Fraunce's Tavern, and to finish the evening they rode to Staten Island and back twice and wished that there was time to go again. On their first journey the water was a glittering blue, the gulls were silvery white, and the city a vast and incredible rose-colored castle, like an enormous Saint Michel with a gilded tip. On the second, twilight had fallen and only here and there in office buildings showed twinkling lights. The millions of toilers had gone home leaving the world to Crusen and Phebe.

Phebe knew that she should not have spent this afternoon away from her work. A marked paragraph in her catalogue,

which she knew by heart, warned her of judgment to come. "The candidate will be expected to present, during the second week in May, an essay on a subject approved by the Department." She had long ago selected her subject, but her essay was far from complete. But now she was not thinking of essays.

"I've never really seen the sea," she said. "That is, where it rolls in on a beach or dashes against rocks and where one can watch the tide. I don't believe all they say about the tide. This summer I'm going to the shore whenever I can."

Crusen was silent. His youth was not gone, he was triumphantly certain of that, and never had affection been offered with such abounding generosity, nor had affection been accompanied by so many other desirable qualities — good-humor, intelligence, physical beauty. He believed in Phebe's ability to meet any situation, licit or illicit, an open engagement or a secret rendezvous.

"I'd like to tell you all about my simple life," said Phebe, curling her hand a little more closely in his.

"Have you any important confession to make?" Crusen smiled — if any love ever bore the marks of a first experience, it was this.

"Well," said Phebe, "there was the telegraph operator."

"The one with the black mane and the perfume and the small mustache?"

"Yes," laughed Phebe. "I was quite distressed when he married our neighbor. It burst upon me in a flash one day when I saw him riding in her Ford. She decided to get married suddenly and she was still in mourning and her black veil floated behind her. So I had to get over that."

"And then?"

"Then there was Dr. Todd, the principal of the Normal School. He cast a spell over me and I worked my poor head

off to please him. I thought him marvelous, but I was entirely cured of him too. I saw him admiring himself in a mirror. He looked like Hilarius Hersh — Hilarius Hersh! He isn't hilarious now. Elma henpecks him from morning till night."

Crusen returned to the subject in hand.

"Did either of these gentlemen ever kiss you?"

"Mercy, no!" cried Phebe. "No one ever kissed me."

Crusen smiled again. "You've had abstemious friends." He leaned toward her lifted cheek. "There!" he said consolingly.

"Do you remember the evening you invited me to go with you to the furnace?" asked Phebe.

Crusen disengaged his hand and lit a cigarette. He found Phebe's hand waiting the return of his.

"I remember."

"That night you touched my arm. It made me so happy that I ached, but I moved away. And the afternoon when I drove with you on the mountain, you put your hand on mine."

"I thought you a very cold young person."

"You did!" said Phebe. "Cold! Me!"

Crusen tossed his cigarette away and put his arm round her. They were approaching the Battery; already the deck-hands were at the bow making ready to open the gates.

"Listen to me, my dear. In a few minutes we'll be at the wharf; then you'll have to make your lonely way home to all your maiden ladies and gentlemen."

Phebe laughed. "They wouldn't like you to call them that."

"It would be very impolite to call them anything else."

"You mean you're going away again?" In Phebe's voice were distress and the sort of weariness which springs from

hope too long deferred. Yet the hope was one which she did not define even to herself. She never thought of Crusen as inhabiting any other place than his luxurious rooms; her dreams were bounded by the closing of a door between them and the world, any door, between them and time.

Crusen's keen ears marked the note of impatience.

"I'm going to Alabama to-night. My train leaves at ten o'clock."

He felt a sinking of Phebe's whole body. He did not please her by confessing that he should have taken yesterday's train — it was his habit to accept and not to give.

"When you go I feel that you're never coming back. Everything is so wretched and dull. I do my work half-heartedly and I hate all those women. Are you going to be gone long?"

The answer was a funeral knell.

"For a month."

"A month!"

"And this summer I'm going first to Michigan, then to England. My passage is taken on the Normandie on July 30."

Phebe had a leaping, dazzling, almost intolerable hope. Crusen drew her closer.

"Listen to me. Two weeks from now, on the first of May, I shall be in Philadelphia over Saturday and Sunday, then I go to Chicago. There's a little resort on the Jersey coast below Philadelphia where I used to go years ago, a lovely spot, isolated, quiet, absolutely away from the world, with a comfortable hotel and beautiful dunes and all the sea you want — Crescent Beach it's called. I'm tired of seeing you for a few hours in public places. Suppose you come down and meet me there."

Phebe sat with her head bent, her blood racing.

"It would be very easy. I never knew any young woman so free. You could be supposed to be with your uncle, couldn't you?"

Phebe still sat motionless and silent. She had no compunctions; her imagination had never been controlled and the stream of her desire ran swiftly.

"Answer me, Phebe."

"I suppose I could," she said in a whisper.

"There's no communication between Miss Dennis and Beulah, is there?"

This uttering of Beulah's name seemed an endearing intimacy.

"None whatever."

"I'll give you the most explicit directions and I'll be there before you. We can have from Friday till Sunday. Will you?"

Phebe did not say yes, neither did she say no.

"You're a free agent, you're not a child. Nothing can hurt you."

"I haven't any coherent thoughts," said Phebe. "I can't remember anything but you."

Crusen laughed and kissed her.

"I couldn't keep my own name, of course. William Smith is safe and sane. Can you remember that? And Crescent Beach? And the foolish name of the hotel — The Dunes?"

"They're not hard names," said Phebe slowly.

"And you can say you've gone to Millerstown?"

Phebe was still slower to answer. That which made her hesitate had nothing to do with Millerstown; it was another marked passage in her catalogue: "The candidate will be expected to demonstrate at an oral examination during the second week in May his ability to control some important

language other than English, his familiarity with the general methods of Comparative Literature, and his acquaintance with some particular field of his choice."

"It's only a little more than two weeks," said Crusen.

"Will you write to me?"

"I'll write you the most careful directions."

"Are you going to kiss me?"

Crusen laughed his clear, light laugh. He helped her across the gangplank and held her up when she stumbled. At the curb he hailed a cab.

"Sixteen North Washington Square," he said to the chauffeur. To Phebe's joy he stepped in beside her.

PART VI

PART VI

I

UNTIL eight o'clock the April morning was bright, and, animated by a springtime energy, the boarders in the Dennis house rose early. Jerome and Roberts had an elaborate itinerary for a tramp on Long Island; Miss Carter was to be fetched by a cousin in Scarsdale who paid her this slight attention once a year, and Valentine was to visit the Daubs. Miss Andrews and Miss Vermilye, inseparable as ever, were to spend the day at Long Beach and Flora and Irene were going with them.

Gertrude had made no plans except to keep Phebe company. Owing to her limited leisure, they had as yet done little sight-seeing and she tried not to be hurt when she heard a casual allusion to some place they had expected to visit together. She had begun to fear that Phebe was after all not changed by New York, and that she would become again, and that before long, the morose Phebe of Granger.

"Then," said Gertrude, "I can do no more for her."

Happy in the sunshine, Gertrude whistled as she dressed. She would do exactly as Phebe wanted. If Jerome and Roberts dreamed of a possibility of company, they would extend an enthusiastic invitation and that would be a pleasant day.

Phebe did not whistle as she dressed, nor did she make plans. Eight days had passed since Crusen left, but she had had no word. She had not taken her usual walks, but

had worked at her essay in the University library and then had hurried home to get her mail. To-day she had no incentive for haste — there would be no mail. As she went slowly toward the hatefully cheerful voices in the dining-room, she was aware of a change in the morning light and she entered the drawing-room and looked out the window. The sunshine was already gone, and the sky gray. She noticed at once an alteration of tone in the loud chatter — there, too, the shadow had fallen. She felt an instant's grim satisfaction, then she blushed for shame.

In the dining-room Roberts and Valentine had left their places and were looking out the north window. The sky in that direction was still bright, but the increasing dullness of the light could not be denied.

"Surely it's not going to rain!" said Miss Andrews in dismay.

"It simply can't!" declared Valentine.

Miss Carter's proud head bent. Her cousin would neither come for her in the rain nor extend a second invitation. The storm was presaged by a hot tear on her plate.

Margaret Dennis heard ominous sounds, a tiny whistle, and a little shaking of the panes. The plans of every one had been so certain that she had not provided her usual Sunday supplies, and now all would be here with appetites sharpened by disappointment. Her eyes telegraphed anxiety to Mary. However, they would make out somehow.

As Phebe slipped into her place the first drop struck the window. Every one looked at her, some with pity for youth's plans disappointed, some with bitterness because of youth's remaining opportunities.

"What were you going to do to-day?" asked Roberts.

"I hadn't a plan." Phebe's light indifference further irritated those who envied her. "See how it rains!"

Already rivers of water ran down the panes.

Miss Carter looked up. "You have —" she began, but could not proceed.

"I have what?" said Phebe brightly and cruelly.

"I like a day like this," said Elizabeth.

At sound of the gentle voice most of the children recovered themselves and a brisk conversation covered Miss Carter's despair and Phebe's bad humor.

Gertrude followed Phebe to her room.

"Let's go to the Cathedral — we've wanted to for months; then to the Metropolitan Museum and do a section thoroughly."

"I don't care for the Cathedral and the Museum," said Phebe.

Gertrude lingered in the doorway.

"Is anything the matter?"

Phebe believed that she hated the neat little figure, the tidy coiffure, the frank blue eyes, the capable hand — a typical old maid Gertrude was getting to be!

"Why should you think there's anything the matter?"

Gertrude held her ground.

"You're not yourself. Why don't you go home for a little visit? You could get off on Friday morning by cutting for once and be back for your first class on Monday. Why don't you?"

Phebe turned her face away, knowing that she grew pale.

"Perhaps I shall." But this unconscious aid was mockery. Crusen had grown tired of her.

"I certainly should," said Gertrude cheerfully.

Facing the long day, Phebe decided that in the afternoon she would play Ambrose's organ and thus hasten the slow-moving hours. She had not decided to accept his invitation, but she had been practicing Bach fugues on Jerome's

piano. She would go to the morning service and ask whether she might come in the afternoon.

Holding her umbrella low, she walked rapidly southward by the most direct route, intent upon speaking to Ambrose before the service. The Woolworth Tower was not in view, and there were only the grimy houses, the homely fire-escapes, the ever-present laundry, dripping in the rain.

At the church door she came upon Ambrose.

"Good-morning!" said he, amazed.

Phebe laughed. "I haven't lost my mind. I came to ask whether I might play this afternoon."

"Certainly. And I wonder whether you'd do us a great favor this morning." Ambrose spoke hesitatingly.

"What is it?" asked Phebe from the pavement.

"My organist is an uncertain volunteer and she evidently isn't coming. Will you play? You'd have a profoundly appreciative audience. Will you?"

"If you think I can." The prospect was not unpleasant and Phebe went slowly up the steps.

Ambrose took her umbrella and closed it and led the way to the choir loft where he lifted the lid of the organ and opened the hymnal.

"You'll have no trouble. These are the hymns and here is your music on the shelf just as you left it."

Phebe mounted the bench at the same instant that the door opened to admit the first worshiper. Beginning softly she heard footsteps in the aisle and a familiar creaking sound which she could not identify. When the opening service was concluded, she looked down curiously. In this dreary morning at least a hundred persons had gathered to hear Ambrose, and one of them was Tolstoi. But Tolstoi was a Jew!

Ambrose preached on the oft-selected text, "Finally,

brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Phebe heard and yet did not hear, having long ago taught herself to remain conscious of what was going on round her, yet to live in dreamland. Listening to Ambrose, she dreamed of Crusen, and in this soft light, soothed by this pleasant voice, she forgot his silence. Her dreaming was so vague, the incidents so indefinite, that she felt no incongruity between it and her present office.

Once she came to herself; Ambrose was quoting familiar words, "His soul was like a white bird which he must carry in his bosom across a crowded place," and for a moment he had her attention, not for his message but for himself. She saw George Weidner staggering from the hotel, climbing into his rickety buggy, laughed at, mocked, despised. One evening she had heard him shouting an obscene song as he urged his horse up the mountain road, and every one said that the half-witted woman was like an animal, yet Ambrose talked about the soul being a white bird! Perhaps it was more wholesome to have evil a commonplace in one's youth than to have it enter as a cankering worm which was forgotten by day, but which at night ate into one's soul. The soul a white bird — impossible!

The congregation was composed for the most part of middle-aged men and women without the appearance of prosperity. In the one youthful person, a slender girl in a blue hat and coat, Phebe recognized Ada Haldeman. When she had played the congregation out of church, Ambrose came up the steps.

"You have made this a day to be remembered."

"It was nothing," said Phebe drearily.

Ambrose helped her on with her coat.

"The door will be open all day. Come any time you wish."

But a definite engagement was intolerable, and she answered as though the idea of her playing had originated with Ambrose.

"I'm not sure I shall be free. I have a tentative engagement." They went down the steps together. "I think you may be proud to have Mr. Tolstoi and Miss Haldeman come to hear you."

"Tolstoi can get to this church easily," explained Ambrose. "Miss Haldeman doesn't come often."

"I thought your sermon excellent."

"Did you?" said Ambrose briefly.

Dinner at the Dennis house was a silent meal, though Margaret and Mary had achieved a menu which was a success in spite of the lack of a roast, and they looked at each other with sisterly pride. Valentine and Miss Carter alone were absent. Miss Carter had her dinner in her room, and Valentine had been fetched by his admirer. Phebe knew that her experience would interest every one, but she did not impart it. Gertrude did not look in her direction; she waited now on Phebe's better self.

As they rose, the doorbell rang, and in the absence of the maid Gertrude answered it. When a voice said, "Special Delivery," they listened intently, each heart longing for something to enliven the deadly monotony. There were even certain messages of death which would have been looked upon as enlivening.

But only one person could have one letter. Gertrude called Phebe to the door and Phebe took the stubby pencil, her thumping heart shaking her body. The violence of her emotion terrified her — how should she hide it? But mercifully every one had disappeared.

In her room she tore open the envelope. Crusen began without any term of endearment and without apology for his silence, but Phebe missed none of these amenities.

Go to Philadelphia on Friday, being sure that you have plenty of time to get to the Camden ferry. Leave Camden at four-eight for Bay View, arriving at six. Wait half an hour and take a train for Crescent Beach, arriving at eight. I shall be there. Bring only what you need to be comfortable and nothing marked with your name.

Phebe's heartbeats gradually slackened and her alternating paleness and flaming blushes settled into her steady color. Now she could be happy, now she could finish her essay, now she could be pleasant! She hurried to Gertrude's room.

"Gertrude, I was snippy this morning. Let's go out, anywhere."

Gertrude laid down her book. She cherished no malice; she did not, as ninety-nine persons out of a hundred would have done, make Phebe select their destination.

"All right. The wind is changing and it'll clear before night. Let's ride to the Museum, get our supper uptown, and walk home."

She was certain now that Phebe had a lover, and that her letter had come from him. He was, however, far away; the postmark was Birmingham, Alabama. She sighed, then she recalled herself to cheerfulness with her quotation about the dear gazelle.

II

PHEBE bent her flushed cheek to Gertrude's kiss. She rarely embraced any one, but at this moment nervousness led her into doing she knew not what. It was Friday morning and she was leaving ostensibly for Millerstown. Sitting on the seat of the hatrack, Gertrude scrutinized her critically.

"The train goes at nine?"

"Yes," answered Phebe.

"You're not dressed very warmly; better take your scarf."

Filled with irritation, Phebe climbed to the third story and fetched her scarf. Gertrude behaved as though she were a child starting to school; next she would inquire about handkerchiefs.

"When does your cousin's baby arrive?"

Phebe looked frightened. She had sent prospective Catherine Phebe many gifts and then had forgotten her. "About this time, I think."

"I hope you won't get there for the party. That wouldn't be much of a rest."

"No," laughed Phebe nervously. She went back to the dining-room to speak to Margaret, then she said good-bye to Gertrude again and took her bag and passed out the front door.

"No umbrella?" Gertrude called after her, and she shook her head. The corner looked like an unattainable goal. She was afraid that in a minute Gertrude would come running after her.

At the corner a sudden puff of wind took her breath. She laughed with excitement, but quickly sobered. That was not the right direction for the wind at the beginning of a pleasure excursion! Surely it was not time for another storm! She wished for her umbrella, but she could not go back when she was supposed to be halfway to the ferry, though instead she was turning north, following her Thanksgiving Day path. She walked rapidly, shifting her bag occasionally from one hand to the other. It was half-past nine when she reached the station and learned that a convenient train left at one o'clock and arrived at Philadelphia at three. Crusen had said that half an hour would be ample time for

her to reach the Camden ferry, and she would have an hour. Having secured her ticket and deposited her bag, she sat down in the waiting-room, pressing her hand against her breast to assure herself that she still had the crackling envelope which contained Crusen's letter and enough money to insure her against loss of her purse. Her quarterly income had not arrived, but she felt as little anxiety about her scanty resources as she felt about the approaching examination for which she was ill-prepared.

She decided that she would buy a book at Brentano's, and she set forth, but when her hand was on the latch of the door she remembered Miss LaMotte, who often lunched with Irene. — Suppose Miss LaMotte should mention that she had seen her at ten o'clock! She turned back toward the station, the ominous wind behind her. She looked at her watch — it was a quarter after ten, almost three hours until her train left. She walked on absently, square after square until she saw that the faces round her were black. She had almost reached the huge, dismal Paulist church, and she longed to sit down for a moment and be perfectly still. The church was brighter than it had been when she visited it earlier, but she was not interested in decorations. She sat motionless, her eyes fixed, for ten minutes, then she went back to the street.

At a quarter to twelve she reëntered the station and ate lunch and bought several magazines and secured her bag, and at a quarter to one stood waiting, a self-possessed and charming figure in her blue suit. What she was about to do seemed a matter which concerned herself alone and which was wholly within her right as a free human being.

She went down the same stairway which she and Crusen had descended together, and along the platform on which they had walked, and entering a car sat with her arms

folded. The familiar, slow, delicious, and yet painful throbbing of her heart began and she tried to still it with the pressure of her hand. The train started, but she did not look up. Presently a sensation in her head told her that they were under the river and in a few moments she looked out upon brown marshes set here and there with dead trees. She had escaped, she was free.

Her elation lasted only an instant. In the last hour the color of the sky had changed to a uniform gray. Her window was clear, but on the other side the view was blotted out by streams of water. The clouds were so thick that they created a twilight and the strange midday dullness cast a shadow over her heart. She realized suddenly that in fair weather or foul she would arrive at Crescent Beach long after dark — suppose the night should be stormy, and suppose Crusen should not be there! Terrified, she saw herself standing alone by an empty platform; then she remembered her ample supply of money and her ability to take care of herself. But to take care of herself was not the object of this journey.

To quiet her panic she opened one of her reviews. She would read deliberately, article by article, from "Why Study Latin?" at the beginning to "Panama Tolls" at the end. If she slighted no word, grasped every thought, she would arrive in Philadelphia by the time she finished. She kept her hand upon her watch and in her subconscious mind she heard it tick and saw the hands move. The patter of the rain grew sharper, the sky more lowering, and when the train stopped she realized that the wind was blowing furiously. She watched a lonely traveler on a country road pushing his way against the wind. When his umbrella was turned inside out and he stood unprotected in the downpour, she remembered that she had no umbrella. But she could reach the ferry without getting from under cover.

When she asked for a ticket in the ferry-house, the agent looked at her surprised.

"Crescent Beach, you say?"

Phebe answered haughtily. "I said Crescent Beach."

"Very well, then," said he smartly. "Crescent Beach. Change at Bay View."

Phebe took her ticket and crossed a rainswept space into the boat. On the far side of the dim river she said "Bay View" to an official and he nodded toward a train. Dropping her bag upon a seat, she let herself drop beside it, remembering the warm clasp of Crusen's arm, the benison of his kiss. She saw at first small towns, then dimly through the rain green fields, and before darkness closed in she had a glimpse of scrub-oaks and white roads. She was nearing the sea!

The lamps were too dull to read by and in the semi-darkness the minutes dragged interminably. The half-dozen other human beings sat like graven images. When, quivering and rocking, the train stopped at Bay View, she hurried to the door so that she might see the way for a dash into the station. She had thought of Bay View as a spot from which she should have her first full view of a blue ocean, but now she saw nothing. The train moved away; she watched its red light vanish.

In the station a gnomelike little woman, sitting with her feet on her old-fashioned satchel, began to talk at once, as though Phebe had been a companion who had merely left her for a moment. Her skin was shrunken, her hair obviously dyed, and large brilliants glittered on her ears.

"It's coming down," she said, "coming down. But it makes no difference to me. I'm snug here and I'm snug when I get home. I live at Beach Haven with my son, or rather between Beach Haven and Crescent Beach. He's the captain of the coast guard; he has eight men who patrol

day in, day out, night in, night out, year in, year out. Why don't you sit down?"

"Do you think it's going to keep on raining?" asked Phebe.

"Yes, ma'am," said the discouraging old woman. "Yes, ma'am, till the moon changes to-morrow night. Then it'll clear."

Phebe brightened a little. "The tide must be very interesting."

The old woman began to talk about perigee and apogee, and the length of the ebb and flow, and the changing of the shore-line from year to year, a new beach here, a great dune one year and the next no dune at all. When she was a girl, there had been a flood and the whole population sat on the dunes all night.

"Is the train usually on time?" asked Phebe.

"Yes, ma'am. You can hear her now rumbling in. She comes from the south, and goes back to the south."

"Ah!" sighed Phebe. It would be this train which had left Crusen at Crescent Beach. She started up and seized her bag.

"There's plenty of time," said the old lady.

The conductor entered in a dripping poncho. He said, "Hello, Mother Figgins," and spoke to Phebe politely. She nodded absently; she was hearing Crusen's voice — "A lovely spot, isolated, quiet, absolutely away from the world." She followed Mrs. Figgins into the train and sat down behind her, Paradise still an hour and a half away. The train started with a jerk, the wheels creaked, the wooden framework rocked from side to side. The conductor who was also brakeman collected the two tickets, regarding Phebe with mild astonishment. They stopped at stations, but no one got on, though sometimes there was a bumping of boxes and a sound of voices. The train shuddered under the onslaught of the wind.

"You say you've lived here always?" said Phebe.

"Yes, ma'am, always. It's an island. We cross a thoroughfare a couple o' miles down here — that's a loop of the sea. The island was once covered with cypress trees and red cedars, the kind you use for lead pencils, and the owner was offered millions and millions, but he wouldn't sell. He used to pasture cattle here, and they'd stick their long horns out at you from the thickets. Then the dunes came in and everything was spoiled. Fine hollies we had, too. They're dead now."

Phebe counted the fingers of one hand, then the fingers of the other. A half-hour passed. He would come; he had never failed. She thought of a warm bright room, a fire, food, Crusen's embrace, the sound of the sea. Another hour and this loneliness, these uncontrollable anticipations of disaster, this fearful uncertainty, would be past. She knew no uncertainty when she was happy.

Pitying the poor creature who was old and who had no lover to meet her, she spoke to her kindly and carried her bag to the door when they reached Beach Haven. A tall man in a helmet and shining rubber coat put up both arms and lifted the little woman down. She was not, after all, a person to be pitied. Now Phebe wrapped her scarf round her throat and sat with her bag on her knees. In another five minutes, in another minute, she would see Crusen.

The train stopped with a jerk, and she felt for the step with her foot. She saw a man's figure — he was here. Her throbbing heart shook her body as the wind shook the train, and when the figure approached, she almost fell. But this was a taller man and he did not have Crusen's free step! He carried a lantern and held it up, staring. He was still staring when the train drew out, the conductor leaning over the steps looking at them both. The gleam of the lantern

pierced only a little way into the darkness, but it was certain that Crusen was not here. Phebe saw the light flashing dimly on a pair of black eyes and a ragged gray mustache and heard a deep reverberation like a muttering pedal note. She stood rooted to the spot, and the man continued to hold the lantern above her head.

"Good-evening," he said at last.

"Is this Crescent Beach?" Phebe's question ended on a little shriek.

"Yes, miss."

"Is there a hotel here called 'The Dunes'?"

"There used to be. It's called 'The Plaza' now."

A few seconds passed.

"Could I get a room there?" asked Phebe slowly.

"Yes, miss. I'm the proprietor. I'm sure you can't get a room elsewhere."

"Is there no telegram for me?"

"We have no station here."

"No message of any sort? No telephone call?"

"We have no telephone."

"Is there a train from the south to-night?"

"None." The stranger shifted his umbrella. "If you walk by me, I can keep you dry. My name's Grimshaw."

Close to the rubber coat and a half-smoked, unlit cigar, Phebe stepped into the darkness. There was no gleam of light except the flickering lantern, there was only the thunderous sound toward which they bent their steps, walking on a cement pavement over which sand had drifted. Phebe thought suddenly and in terror of a clerk, of chambermaids, waiters, guests. Her name — what was her name?

In a few moments Grimshaw said, "Here's the gate," and held the lantern so that Phebe could see the opening in a fence from which the gate itself had long since dropped. Sand was

heaped on each side and a deep drift of sand lay across the walk. A lamp shone dimly through a window. They reached a porch and crossed it, and Grimshaw opened a door.

"Sally," said he, "here's company."

In a shabby room, once the office and lounge of the hotel, a woman sat rocking. She wore a gingham dress, a man's old coat, and a pink boudoir cap, and she propelled herself by giving regular kicks against the stove. The heavily laden chair swung backward and she sat with her feet dangling, her broad white face expressing profound astonishment. Grimshaw closed the door, himself and Phebe inside. Seen in the bright light of the old hanging lamp he was a tall, flat-chested man who looked as though his body had shrunk and his mustache wilted under the bitter wind of fate. Across his too-large vest, once white, hung a heavy watch-chain. His somber eyes showed points of light like fires in a dead crater.

"This young lady expected to meet some one," he explained with indescribable lordliness. Thus might have spoken the owner of a thousand slaves. "She'll spend the night. She'll have supper."

He invited Phebe to take off her coat and sit down. The huge woman got slowly out of her chair and, waddling through a door, vanished. Grimshaw looked at Phebe hungrily.

"Perhaps your friend was here years ago?"

Phebe flushed and grew terrified, she had not said "a friend," she had said "some one." But one term was after all as vague as the other.

"Yes," she faltered.

But it was not curiosity which prompted Grimshaw's question; no living creature had a mind less inquisitive.

"I guessed as much." He thrust his hands into his pockets, then drew them out with a sweeping gesture. "All gone.

All gone," he said dramatically. "Money, faith, hope, the toil of a slave. We had a select resort, aristocratic clientèle, picturesque cottages of substantial construction. Crowded on Sundays. Patrons paid their bills. Generous givers — no fuss about anything. Ideal. Large fees to servants. Now all gone. *Gone!*"

Phebe sank against the back of her chair.

"What happened?" she asked faintly.

"The dunes came in. Sand blew the wrong way. Dunes on the beach, dunes between the casino and the cottages, dunes in front of the cottages, dunes over fences, dunes in the streets, dunes in dooryards, dunes everywhere, creeping, crawling, cursed dunes. Why, miss, Pompeii was not more utterly blasted. Down at the corner you can see a row of posts sticking out of the sand; they're lamp-posts. Boys have stood, little boys, and kicked the tops off. The population fled — there was nothing else to do. Each one lost his home. I lost everything, health, credit, property."

"That was too bad," said Phebe, still more faintly.

Her tone reminded Mr. Grimshaw of his duties as host and he opened the door and looked out into a dark hall, letting in the odor of an oil stove.

"It won't take her long," he promised. He perched on the edge of a table as a clubman might perch as he talked to his companions. "Casino with dances every night. Stages running from Beach Haven and Harris Harbor. Dozens used to row across from Bay View and walk down. Harris Harbor, too, had quite an aristocratic clientèle, but nothing to compare to ours. Their casino was empty while ours was crowded. We had some one to teach the old country dances so everybody could take part up to the grandfathers and down to the babies. Now it's all gone."

Heavy footsteps approached through the hall and the door

was opened by a violent kick. A tray entered, followed by Sally's enormous body. Grimshaw vacated the table and she set down the tray. She stared at Phebe with an almost tender interest.

"This is Sally," said Grimshaw with a little cough.

Nodding her great head and her pink cap, Sally sat down in the rocking-chair. In her hunger Phebe found the warmed-up coffee and hastily cooked bacon and eggs tolerable, and after a few mouthfuls her heart seemed to rise a little way from her shoes.

"I can't understand why you didn't have a letter making arrangements for me."

"I don't fetch my letters often," confessed Grimshaw. "There's no use going to Beach Haven to fetch catalogues."

Suddenly Phebe dropped her fork. Above the sound of the wind there was the sound of footsteps. She grasped the edge of the table, hoping that when Crusen entered she would not faint. But it was a coast guard and not Crusen. He stood dripping pools of water on the floor, a shy kindliness beaming from his blue eyes.

"Mother traveled with this young lady and felt anxious about her," he explained in a deep voice. "She didn't ask where she was going."

"This is Mr. Figgins," explained Grimshaw. "The young lady expected to meet a friend. We'll take care of her."

"That's right." Figgins laid his great hand on the knob.

"Any sign of change?" asked Grimshaw.

"None." Figgins opened the door letting in again the sound of wind and rain and the deep thunder of the surf. At the same instant a clock struck nine. Phebe pushed back her plate.

"What trains have you?" she asked falteringly.

"We have one at 8.09 A.M. and one at 7.30 P.M. coming north, and 9.08 A.M. and 8 P.M. coming south."

"No others?"

"They grudge those. We used to have four each way and extras Saturdays."

"There's no train from anywhere to-night?"

"No, miss."

"I think I'll go to my room," said Phebe steadily.

Grimshaw looked disappointed.

"Sally, you fix her room."

Sally rose lumberingly and approached the door.

"The lady's bag, Sally!"

"I'll carry that," offered Phebe. "Good-night."

Turning in the doorway and almost upsetting her follower, Sally took a half-burned candle from the mantel and lit it.

"Our electric lights have gone out," said Grimshaw with bitter irony.

The hall was cold and draughty and the steps creaked under Sally's heavy tread. She panted and groaned as she climbed upward. At the head of the stairs she opened a door into a little room, almost filled by a double bed, a bureau, a wash-stand, and a single chair. From the ceiling hung a strip of wall-paper, which rustled and waved in the breeze. Sally placed the candlestick on the bureau and touched the bed with her hand, and, having brushed the sand from her palm, spoke for the first time.

"Them dumes!" said she in a hollow tone. She turned the pitcher upside down and shook out the sand. "Feel it under your feet! You'd think I never swept. I'll fetch sheets." She departed with elephantine steps.

Phebe went to the window and raised the shade. She could see nothing and could hear only the rumble of the pouring rain, with the deeper undertone of the sea. She sat

on the sand-covered chair and waited the return of Sally, shudders traversing her body.

Sally, too, was jealous for the fame of Crescent Beach.

"It used to be fine," she said, approaching. "Fine! Such tips as we got! But them dumes come in." She repeated all that Grimshaw had said. "Day in and day out nothing but dumes. But I say what happened once may happen twice. Blow in, I say, blow out."

"I suppose you like to look at the sea," said Phebe.

"I never look at it," declared Sally with scorn. "I look the other way." Opening the sheets she felt of them disapprovingly. "I'll fetch you a bottle of hot water. These sheets is damp. I fix my bed that way." She went out, shaking the flimsy building and with it Phebe's tired body, and returned in a few moments carrying a large bottle wrapped in a towel. "Are you tired?"

"Yes," said Phebe, speaking from her heart. "Could you get me another candle?" Her voice trembled; she took a dollar from her purse and pressed it into Sally's hand. At it Sally looked stupidly.

"You pay him, not me."

"That's for you."

Without answering, Sally backed out and returned with two candles, each a little used. She brought also a great bell, with which she had once been wont to call the boarders from the beach.

"We once had wall-bells," she panted. "If you need anything, you can ring this. There's nothing here to hurt you, not a thing. If you hear noises, it's only rats or the blamed house creaking or the wind blowing."

"Thank you," said Phebe. "Good-night."

The door was closed, the footsteps died away. The noises were heard once more, creakings within and tumult without,

and after a while tiny scampering feet. Phebe sat motionless, her hands, from which the blood seemed to have receded, folded on her lap. She felt anguish of mind approaching as one hears a storm across the fields, inevitable, inexorable. She lifted her hands as though to shield herself, but pain overwhelmed her, choking her, stabbing the back of her neck. She rose aimlessly and knelt down, her face against the sandy coverlet. She did not reflect that Crusen, too, might feel disappointment or chagrin; she thought only of herself. It was not right that so terrible a calamity could befall one. She said again and again, "It isn't right! It isn't right!"

Suddenly she sprang up. Probably he had not intended to come by train, but by motor, and he might still arrive! She might hear at any moment the sound of a car and a furious, insistent pounding at the door. Using all her strength she lifted the window a few inches. The candle flamed in the draught and she opened the closet door and placed it inside and raised the window again. She could hear only wind and rain and the deep, pulsating foundation tone, like the drums in "The Emperor Jones." She closed the window and brought out her candle and began to undress, her cold fingers fumbling with hooks and buttons. Deep resentment added itself to pain and astonishment. Shivering profoundly and only partly undressed, she crept into the damp bed with its single warm spot. Sally's forethought was her salvation, the blessed heat crept upward. She had not expected to sleep, but she slept soundly. Once she opened her eyes and half unconsciously rose and finished her preparations for bed. She remembered the morning trains, eight-nine going north, nine-eight coming south. He would come then! But these hours were gone forever. She began to cry and, blinded with tears, fell asleep once more.

III

PHEBE'S body and soul woke slowly, and she lay wondering at unaccustomed irregularities in her bed and at the uncomfortable height of her pillow. In the gray light she watched bewildered the festoon of paper waving to and fro, then she sat up and recognized her coat on the back of a chair, her hat and gloves on the bureau, her shoes and stockings tossed untidily together. Outside nothing was to be seen but gray mist, in the house nothing was to be heard but creakings and scamperings.

She stepped out upon the floor. Her body was stiff, but her heart leaped. He had been unavoidably delayed; he would come this morning and she would forget her misery. The trains were eight-nine and nine-eight. Her bare feet shrank from the sandy floor and she could have cried out in irritation. With a trembling hand, she took up her watch — it must be after seven, she would have to dress quickly. She looked at her watch — it was twenty minutes after nine. She turned and dropped upon the bed. He had not come!

Now her mind made up for its period of somnolence. She would like to lie down and cover her head and wait for death, but she knew that death would not fetch her at call. She believed that she was done with Crusen and that the spring of love was dry; there remained only the necessity to escape both physically and mentally. This was Saturday morning, she would leave at once and go to Millerstown. She saw Beulah moving about her kitchen, smiling happily in spite of her discomfort, stooping to soothe one child or to help another in his play. Soon there would be a new baby — Catherine Phebe it was to be. She desired above all things Beulah's eyes and arms and Uncle Heimbach's proud, half-awed smile. She would go home. She was aware of uneasiness and fears

at the bottom of her heart, but she would not give them a hearing. She would go home.

She put her damp clothes on her shrinking body and opened the door into the hall. She saw more peeling walls, a long, matting-covered corridor, and windows which let in through bright blue panes a ghastly light. She descended the stairs, and odors rose to meet her, of frying ham, ancient tobacco, and age-long mould. She felt a hot tide rising in her cheek, but she opened the door of the office and walked in.

Grimshaw sat in Sally's rocker with his feet on the stove and a toothpick in his mouth. He sprang up and said good-morning as he might have sprung before the dunes buried his fortune.

"Well, we're marooned," he announced with the brilliant cheerfulness of those who have reached the lowest round of despair.

"Marooned?" Phebe halted in the doorway.

"Yes," said Grimshaw. "When the tide's high and there's a heavy rain the water rises above the bridges on both sides of us."

"Do you mean I can't get away?" asked Phebe.

Grimshaw shook his head. "Not to-day."

"But I must," said Phebe earnestly.

"Believe me, I wish I could help you. You'd better have some breakfast now. Sally's waiting for you in the dining-room. Right down there at the end of the hall."

Phebe followed his pointing finger. She passed a parlor where there was an ancient square piano, then a pool-room, the door of which was off its hinges, and entered a dining-room with empty tables, these, too, sprinkled with sand. At the far end there was a small table set with dishes toward which Sally lumbered, from the kitchen, in her hand a heavy frying-pan, held with as little apparent effort as though it were a fork.

"I was up and looked at you, and you was sleeping like a lamb. We had an awful thing happen once." It was plain that Sally would like to tell this awful thing, but Phebe began to talk quickly; she did not care to hear of awful things.

"I wish only coffee and a piece of toast."

"No ham!" said Sally, amazed.

"No, thank you." Phebe sat down determined to eat, little as she cared for eating. Seen in daylight Sally's plates were not clean, and the napkin was gray.

"Did you hear we were cut off again?"

"Yes," said Phebe. "Suppose some one were dying and you had to go to him, what would you do?"

"In good weather Dick Haight rows folks across the bay. He's a fisherman who lives up the beach. At Bay View there's trains. But you couldn't get to Dick's to-day, and he wouldn't take you over, it's too rough." She sat opposite Phebe and, gloating over this auditor, began to talk, her tongue running as though it were oiled. Phebe ate slowly, coaxing down her food. Sometimes the chatter was lost against the deep, swift current of her own unhappy thoughts, sometimes she understood but too well. The girl, Sally said, had a wedding ring; they thought, of course, that everything was all right. But it wasn't. They had an awful time — fifty people in the house.

"Can't I even see the ocean?" asked Phebe, rising desperately at last. "I thought I heard it last night."

"You did; the tide was high when you came and again this morning, before you was up. Now it's going out."

"Can't I walk to the beach?"

Sally shook her head. "You ought to have heavy things. Better sit in the office. I'm going to make a good dinner for him and you."

Phebe went to her room and made her bed. She opened the drawer of the bureau and found a powder-puff and a man's soiled collar, and shut the drawer quickly. She carried her magazines downstairs and sat by a blank, rain-curtained window. Trying to fix her mind upon the page, she saw other pages. It was now only ten days until she would be expected "to demonstrate her ability to control some language other than English, her familiarity with the methods of Comparative Literature, and her acquaintance with some particular field of her choice." She saw dancing mockingly before her detached, ominous, academic phrases — "forerunners of Romanticism," "international influence of Rousseau," "mediæval religious drama." It was like a nightmare, but the nightmare was her reality. The University, Gertrude, her essay, her examination — these were real and Crusen was a dream. She sat looking at the article with which she had expected to begin — its title was "Guinevere, the Story of a Frog."

Grimshaw looked over old papers at a desk, glancing wistfully at Phebe as though disappointed by her unresponsiveness. By and by he returned to his place by the stove and lifted first one foot, then the other. He took a toothpick from his pocket and gazed at Phebe's shoulder and the side of her head. He was not speculating about her, however; he was dreaming of the time when Fate should lift from Crescent Beach the blanket with which she had so cruelly smothered it. The clock struck eleven and he put a few sticks of wood into the stove; it struck twelve and he said suddenly, "Listen!"

Phebe jumped. "What is it?"

"Wind's changing. It's going to clear." He got up and shook himself and walked round the room.

Phebe looked out. She could see irregularly placed houses,

a towering standpipe, a few cedar and cypress trees. She walked to the window. Beyond the scattered houses lay a beach edged with white, and still beyond the gray sea. But the sea was not to be enjoyed now.

"Will there be a train this evening?"

Grimshaw shook his head. "No, miss."

At dinner Grimshaw occupied the seat opposite Phebe. He ate carefully and was excessively polite. He asked one inoffensive question, "Is your home in Jersey?" — and Phebe explained that it was in New York.

"I ain't been there for twenty years," said he bitterly. "Sometimes I think I'll get out of this, then again I believe I'll be here till the dunes cover me."

When dinner was over, Phebe stood at the window. Again Grimshaw elevated his feet to the stove. The creakings and scamperings invaded even this inhabited spot. The rain still fell. Phebe had but one article remaining and she read it slowly. The clock struck two; she read it again. The clock struck three. Suddenly the light brightened and she lifted her head. Across the street a house wall was drying. She looked toward the east; the white line was nearer and there was a greenish tint on the gray expanse. At the same instant Sally opened the door, on her arm a rubber coat and in her hand a pair of overshoes.

"I found them things in a closet — can you wear 'em? You can tie your scarf round your head and save your pretty hat. Here's a pair of heavy stockings — you put 'em on over them low shoes, then put on the overshoes. You walk up the beach toward the coast-guard station. Nothing can hurt you."

Phebe stepped into the street. Walking was difficult, but she persisted, ploughing through heaps of sand to the water's edge. It was far more wonderful and mysterious

than she had expected, this undulating plain, this eternal motion. But fear took sudden shape and discovery, which had seemed impossible, became probable. Three pairs of eyes looked at her steadily, Beulah's, Uncle Heimbach's, and William's. She did not construct any channel by which the news of her excursion could reach Millerstown; she saw it already there. She had spoiled the sea; enjoyment was impossible with this sharp uneasiness in her heart.

She walked close to the edge of the spent waves, discerning the slow advance of the tide. A huge beam, the relic of some mighty ship, which had been in full view was now buried. She would like to watch the tide come in, mark the moment of its turning, and watch it flow out. But she could not fix her mind upon it now. Beauty was something to be enjoyed along with the excitement of love; it could not be enjoyed in wretchedness of spirit.

Hearing footsteps, she looked sharply round and found Figgins overtaking her with long strides.

"Well," he said awkwardly, "I guess it's pretty tiresome for you."

"I must get away," said Phebe. "Do you think there'll be a train in the morning?"

"Not here. Perhaps Dick Haight would row you to Bay View, but I don't know how you'd get to Dick's."

"I could walk."

"Four miles?"

"Easily."

The guard stroked his chin. "You wouldn't mind getting up early?"

"No."

"At six o'clock I start north on my patrol. The Grimshaws could get up for once. You could go along and Dick would take you over. There's a train at

nine-thirty, gets you to Philadelphia at twelve — would that suit you?"

"Yes," said Phebe, almost weeping.

"Then that's fixed. Why don't you stop to see my mother? The house next the station. I'll tell her you're coming."

Phebe saw a brown building with a tower and a fluttering weather signal, and before it on the beach a large boat. The kindly Figgins strode on and she followed slowly. Upon what errand did Mrs. Figgins think she had come to Crescent Beach? She remembered smiling Alice Hill and the dreadful things which had happened even in Millerstown.

"But I should not have been like that," she said stubbornly.

She stood still a long time. She saw gulls like those that swept about New York Harbor and smaller sea-birds which she did not know. Through the ragged clouds smiled a blue sky and the sea responded with kaleidoscopic changes; it was now golden, now blue-gray, now blue. To her left lay the attenuated settlement. She mounted a steep dune on which long grass was growing, made her way among a few barberry bushes, and climbed a sand-buried flight of steps to a porch where there was a weather-beaten chair. Burning tears came into her eyes — if she could only bathe her soul clean in this sweeping wind! She remembered what she had heard a thousand times, that the soul could easily be bathed clean. But she thought of religion with distaste and rose to make her way back to the beach. Mrs. Figgins waved to her from the door of a cottage.

"I've been watching for you. Come in."

It was a tiny, boxlike place, so small that Phebe felt like a giantess. Mrs. Figgins escorted her into a crowded living-room and brought her tea and began to talk where she had left off last night. She had an intense interest in clothes, and she discoursed upon styles and exhibited several dresses

which she had worn during her visit. After a long time Phebe interrupted to ask a question about the coast guard. Mrs. Figgins laughed.

"If you knew me better, you'd stopped me sooner. We'll go across and pay 'em a call."

Four men slept, she explained; one was in charge of the place, two were out patrolling, and one was in the watch-tower. She led Phebe through bare, shining rooms.

"You can go up to the tower," she said. "I can't climb the ladder. Jack! Jack! Lady coming."

A trapdoor opened and a red face looked down.

Phebe climbed nimbly and from the top a hand reached to help her. She found herself in a small, square room enclosed in glass. The sky was now clear, pale blue, the sea sapphire.

Jack, too, liked to talk; he, too, told of perigee and apogee, of neap and spring tides. At seven the tide would be high. It was the hour of sunset; she had better stay and watch it. The Grimshaws would not care, and he would walk down with her. Questioned, he told of rescues, of great storms, of vigilant but dreary idleness broken by the clanging of the warning gong in the middle of night. He recounted his own history; he had been in the service for twenty-four years. In six more he could be retired at a good pension, or, if he was able, he could keep on. He thought he would keep on.

She watched the sunset, and thankful for company walked down with Jack and sat all evening with Grimshaw and Sally, listening to Grimshaw. In her room she wished that she had watched the night out, hearing Grimshaw. She saw Millerstown faces; if she could have walked to Millerstown to read their eyes quickly, she would have set out.

IV

THE sun, shining on Phebe's face, woke her at five o'clock, and she rose and dressed and put another dollar on her bureau. Her hosts had risen also, and breakfast waited. Grimshaw's bill was small, but there was no disguising his eagerness for the three dollars. Appearing promptly, Figgins took Phebe's bag, and from the gate she looked back at the two figures, unreal in the glowing light, and at the blank windows of an upper room. She felt a shamefaced gratitude for the friendliness of Grimshaw and Sally, not without suspecting that their indifference to the behavior of others was a corollary to a demand for indifference to their own.

The first mile lay between the ranks of deserted houses and the unbounded expanse of the marshes, a living green threaded by brimming thoroughfares and inlets, the color of scillas in beds of grass. In the distance a row of cedars looked like miniature stone-pines against the soft horizon. The road passed close to the thoroughfare, and Figgins pointed to the multitudes of crabs creeping in and out of the oozy bank, and explained the emptying and filling of the marsh, and indicated far inland a drawbridge which was opened when boats passed through.

"Listen," said Phebe. "What is that strange whistle?"

"It's the dried sedge," explained Figgins. "There ain't no sound just like it. But I want you to listen to the birds in this thicket. Catbird, nuthatch, redwing blackbird, purple grackle, cardinal — see him! — goldfinch, Maryland yellowthroat, Baltimore oriole — look at him! There! See the little warblers — there's half a dozen kinds."

"How do you know them so well?"

"I made an observation for the Government. There's a chewink."

Phebe stooped to pick a tiny, yellow flower.

"That's a celandine," said Figgins. Plunging into the thicket, he reappeared with sprays of coral honeysuckle and columbine. "I could show you wild iris and wild cactus."

Phebe was less oppressed by the fear that they might know about her in Millerstown. The road led to the beach and they made the rest of their journey upon it. The sea was blue; not the clear cerulean of the creeks, but a blue darkened with purple, and the edges of the waves were white as wool.

"There's a sail!" cried Phebe.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Those black posts — what are they?"

"Fishing-traps."

The gulls cried hoarsely their delight in the sun and the sea. Figgins stopped to exhibit a ghost crab, then a sand-dollar. He said that once some strange seed had been washed ashore after a wreck and one May morning the whole beach blossomed with purple flowers.

"You ought to come and stay," he invited shyly. "You haven't seen anything."

"I'd like to," said Phebe, hastening her step. It seemed a thousand miles to Millerstown.

Dick, the fisherman, was a deaf-mute, but Figgins made their errand plain and Phebe took a seat in his boat. She could not offer Figgins money; she would find a sumptuous bird-book and send it to his lonely post. From the other side of the rough inlet she looked back and Figgins waved his hand. A new faculty seemed to have been born in her, she was fond of these strangers.

Dick pointed to the station, where stood a passenger car, and, when Phebe looked terrified, he made her understand that there was plenty of time. So this was Bay View which

had seemed so dark and forlorn! She sat down on the car step, her elbows on her knees, her chin on her hands. She would think of nothing but the unlimited splendor of blue.

But again fears trooped upon her; one was no sooner vanquished than another lifted its head. When the second was conquered, the first returned. Suppose that some one from the Dennis house had seen her in New York after the time of the Millerstown train. Suppose some one had seen her at the station buying a ticket for Philadelphia. It would be terrible to have Gertrude suspect her — Gertrude was, next to Beulah, her best friend. For the first time in their acquaintance, she loved her. She stepped down and paced the platform, and the car shut the sea from memory as well as from sight. An engine puffed in jerkily and she began to count, up to twenty and back, up to twenty and back. When the train started, tears came into her eyes.

Waiting three hours in Philadelphia, she nodded with sleep until the cords of her neck ached intolerably. She had a moment of happiness when she saw toys for sale on the news-stand, and she made a selection for the little boys. For the last half-hour she walked up and down before the gate.

It was after seven when she came at last to Millerstown. She was seriously frightened now; her heart throbbed as it did when she heard Crusen's step. The sun had set and the glow was fast fading from the sky. A few stars were out, and Main Street looked as it had looked a thousand times to a different Phebe. She hurried past the post-office, past Neuweiler's store, both of them closed and dark. She believed that she heard Sarah Ann calling, and that another voice said, "Did Phebe come?" and, startled, she walked still faster.

Uncle's house looked as it always looked. She could see in the twilight that Beulah had already put the white cover-

ings on the chairs. As she laid her hand on the gate, she determined to go round to the side door — perhaps she could see some member of the family before he saw her and be reassured by his calm appearance. An irresistible impulse turned her head. She saw the lighted porch of the hotel and an empty chair.

She went on the boardwalk, tottering. The sea was nothing, nor the marshes, nor the soft gray dunes, nor the great sky, nor people's kindness — Crusen had failed her. She walked as though she were being driven by rods, she stumbled up the steps. She had never been hysterical, but she felt hysteria rising. She must control herself; it would not do to burst upon them crying.

She was steadied by an extraordinary sight. She had expected that Uncle and William would be at church, the children in bed, and Aunt Rosie and Beulah sitting in the sitting-room. But through the window she saw that almost all were in the kitchen, and all in astonishing positions. In a rocking-chair at the far end of the room was William; near the stove, as though she were cold, was Aunt Rosie; by the table was Uncle Heimbach, his head on his arms. They sat motionless, exchanging no word. Were they asleep? And where was Beulah?

Phebe grasped the shutter. Where was Beulah? If Beulah was well, why was she not here? If she was ill, why did they not bestir themselves? If her baby was born, why was one of them not with her? She opened the door and stepped in, her face deathly white, her cheeks quivering, asking, "Where is Beulah?"

Blinking stupidly, they lifted their heads.

"*Ach*, Phebe!" cried Aunt Rosie.

"Where is Beulah?" repeated Phebe.

William came toward her. He put his arm round her and held her close.

"It's all right, Phebe! We needn't have frightened you with our telegram."

"I got no telegram," blurted out Phebe. "I just wanted to see you."

Heimbach rose from his place by the table, his stiff beard wagging up and down. "All night we thought she would die, Phebe."

"Who is taking care of her?"

"We have a nurse," said William.

"A trained nurse," said Aunt Rosie.

"From Allentown," said Uncle Heimbach.

"We had to send the children to their other gran'pop," said Aunt Rosie.

"You were scared when you saw us like the Seven Sleepers," laughed Uncle hysterically.

"I'll make supper for you," said Aunt Rosie.

"Perhaps you can see her." With an important yet a deprecating air, as though, himself a powerful potentate, he were about to interview another still more powerful, William tiptoed up the stairs and down. "She says you dare come up."

Phebe took off her hat and coat and went up the stairs. At the top was her old room, and in their bed lay Beulah, and beside the bed stood the Heimbach cradle. The shaded light showed Beulah's pale face and her dark braids spread out on the pillow. She smiled her lovely smile and whispered, "Well, Sister Stannard?"

Phebe could not answer.

"You sit by me a little," invited Beulah faintly.

The nurse, seen by Phebe only as a white figure, pushed up a low chair.

"Catherine Phebe, she is here," said Beulah. "She has a strong will. She must improve yet a good deal to be like you." Still smiling, Beulah fell asleep.

Phebe laid her cheek on Beulah's hand, touching her a little fearfully, and her eyes closed, but presently, as though jerked to her feet, she sprang up, believing that she saw Crusen in the doorway. But it was William who stood looking at Beulah. To her he had given himself and her married home and honor and children, for her he had spread a feast and lighted a fire to comfort her all her life, and now his yearning gaze asked for some new way to make her happy. With quivering distaste, Phebe understood what had been offered her — a feast at which she was not the first, a fire of which the warmth was long spent.

"Your supper is ready," whispered William. Still looking at Beulah, he stepped aside and let Phebe pass.

In the kitchen Uncle Heimbach paced up and down.

"You just thought you had to come," he repeated with profound satisfaction.

"Yes," said Phebe. Again fear sharpened. Would Gertrude read her telegram from Uncle? When had it been sent? How tired she was! How little they dreamed how tired she was!

"When must you go back?" asked Heimbach, sitting opposite her while she ate a little of Aunt Rosie's bountiful supper.

"I ought to go to-morrow now that everything is all right." Phebe remembered her examination with a pang of terror. She opened her bag and took out the toys for the children. "I'll sit with Beulah a little, then I'll go to bed. Shall I sleep with you, Aunt Rosie?"

"Yes." Aunt Rosie burst into tears. "Yesterday morning she was baking and then she had company, and then she got bad. We thought she could never come through."

In the morning Uncle Heimbach took Phebe to the station, and she bought her ticket with him standing close by.

"Here are two telegrams forwarded from New York," said Hilarius, spreading them out. There was no longer the scent of carnations in Hilarius's vicinity, but rather the odors of the kitchen. His hair was still black and outstanding, but his face seemed to have shrunk. He looked at Phebe with the dull interest of a caged bird at one that was free.

Heimbach read the message nearest him. It said:

Come at once Beulah is sick.

"Why, that's what we sent!"

His eyes traveled toward the other, but in a flash it was lifted, still unread, from under his friendly gaze. It said:

Where are you wire immediately University Club Chicago.
A. C.

"Is that yet another telegram for you?" he asked, astonished.

"Yes," answered Phebe. "My friend Gertrude." It was Phebe's first deliberate lie.

Uncle was easily diverted. The train was whistling, and he lifted Phebe's bag.

"You got your little cakes, I guess."

"What little cakes?" asked Phebe.

The train came in with a roar and she had to scream to make herself heard.

Uncle shook his head. "I guess she forgot," he shouted. "Or didn't get them ready in time for him to take. It was the last thing she done — baking." The train stopped and left his voice hanging in the air. "Good-bye. Now come sooner this time, Phebe."

"I will," promised Phebe, climbing the steps. Recalling terrifying academic phrases, she banished from her mind Uncle and the little cakes together with far more important matters.

V

From the station in Jersey City Phebe telegraphed to Crusen, "I am in New York," and carrying her bag, which grew intolerably heavy, she crossed the ferry and entered the Subway on her way to the University. Stupidly she forgot a published change in the Subway trains, and hurrying blindly up into unfamiliar Lenox Avenue, she had to descend again into the airless tunnel. Having emerged finally at her station, she hurried her steps, longing for the sight of familiar faces, even familiar buildings. With a sinking heart she remembered her words to Crusen, "One is very old, almost senile, and two are children, and the other two are middle-aged. One doesn't think of them as men, but as teachers." She shook her head as though she contemplated some rude stranger.

The buildings were the same, but now that she saw them they oppressed her. She thought with repulsion of the crowded dormitories, the throng of human beings cheerfully encountering one another, the intimacies, the unending chatter.

Trying to take notes in a bare little classroom, she wondered whether she could be growing deaf, the noises from outside were so much louder than the instructor's voice. No, it was the sea she heard, the deep thunder which shook the house of Grimshaw. Missing another sentence, she trembled — ten days more and the five teachers who were not men would sit in judgment upon her.

In the interval between her first and second lectures, she telephoned to Gertrude, clutching the receiver with all her strength until she heard Gertrude's pleasant, unsuspicious voice.

"Did you get the telegrams I forwarded?"

"Yes. My cousin has a little girl."

"That's fine," said Gertrude. She seemed to expect no more and Phebe said, "Good-bye."

Reaching home at five o'clock, she found a special delivery letter mailed by Crusen in Philadelphia. She carried it to her room and locked the door. Crusen wrote distractedly:

Owing to a wreck below Baltimore, I missed the afternoon train on Friday. I moved heaven and earth to get to Crescent Beach, even trying to engage a special train. I spent Friday night at Summerton, a horrible place, which I reached by automobile. There I was notified that the water was over the bridges and that the flood would last till Monday. I had learned by this time that there was neither telephone nor telegraph at Crescent Beach and that the dunes had practically destroyed the place. I could not even return here till late Saturday night.

It is Sunday morning and the situation is unchanged. My train for Chicago leaves at noon. I have wired you at New York. I shall be back on Saturday afternoon. Have a letter at the Club telling me where I can see you. It is only my confidence in your common sense that lightens my heart. But for Heaven's sake, let me hear!

Phebe went to her desk. She saw there a parcel wrapped carefully and addressed in Beulah's neat hand; it contained doubtless the little cakes which had well-nigh been Beulah's last earthly achievement. On a small sheet of note-paper she wrote in a large hand, "I am back safely," and sealed the envelope and carried it to the box at the corner. Returning, she met Gertrude who took her arm.

"You look done up. Have a hard time?"

"Rather."

"Is it a nice baby?"

"Very."

"Named for you?"

"Yes." Phebe began to shiver.

"You've taken cold," said Gertrude. "I was sure you

would. You let me fix you up after dinner and you go to bed. A good night's rest is what you need."

"I can't have a good night's rest till my examination is over."

"Your examination won't be hard. You go to bed after dinner, it'll be a gain in the end."

"Do you think so?" asked Phebe humbly.

"I know it."

"What are you going to do this evening?"

"I'm going to read."

"Will you bring your book to my room if I go to bed?"

"Surely. Want me to read to you?"

"No. I only want you there."

Gertrude flushed scarlet as she said, "I'll be there." Was it possible that Phebe needed her?

She sat two hours later looking at Phebe's face on the pillow. It was not flushed but pale; her physical trouble was clearly only weariness. Her hands were folded under her round cheek, her bright braid lay over her shoulder, her mouth drooped; she had, Gertrude believed, some trouble of the mind or heart. Gertrude said to herself, "Poor child!" and turned out the light and went to her own room.

VI

CRUSEN opened the door into his sitting-room at four o'clock on Saturday afternoon. The express had seemed to creep, and the taxicab to crawl. Directing the man who carried his bag to bring his mail at once, he took off his hat and overcoat and stood by the window, snapping the sill with the back of his fingers.

Beneath him wound the afternoon procession which usually gave him keen pleasure. He had as large an income as many of the men who rode in handsome cars and could have if he wished an elaborate apartment on Park Avenue. Such an

establishment seemed at times attractive, then undesirable — at least if he were bound to it. He sometimes considered the possibility of such an establishment without being bound to it, and reflected that a little girl from Millerstown might well congratulate herself if by any means she should rise to so comfortable a position.

In the bright light he looked his age, and there was the slightest appearance of heaviness in the turn of his body as, hearing the man's knock, he went to take his letters. He shifted them over quickly. He would not have been surprised to find Phebe in the station watching for the Chicago train. She would have been cruelly disappointed, but she would not be angry — she was too sensible for that, and also too much in love. She would need first of all to relate her wretched experience and perhaps to shed a few tears, then she would be fonder of him than ever. His mistake about Crescent Beach was unpardonable; he should have had her meet him here, still with Millerstown as an excuse.

After he had read her letter, he would have a bath and a cup of coffee, then he would go to meet her. He saw her message before he opened the letter; she would probably say, with brevity learned from him, "Pennsylvania Station, 6 o'clock," having selected the station because, if he were a little late, nobody would look at her curiously.

But now that he held her letter in his hand, a cold wind of dismay smote him. It was so tiny and her handwriting was so unnaturally large. He sat down before he opened it, and turned the little envelope over and over. Inside there was one curt sentence. His face expressed pure astonishment, then unrelieved anger, then anxiety. She could have but one excuse. He went to the telephone and gave the Dennis's number, and, asking peremptorily for Miss Stannard, was told that she was ill.

"Has she been ill long?"

The answer came back, "No, sir."

"What is the trouble?"

The maid said that Miss Gertrude said she thought Miss Stannard was just tired.

"Tell her that Mr. Crusen has called, and ask whether there is a message for him."

It seemed a long time until the maid returned.

"Miss Stannard says there's no message."

Crusen's anxiety sharpened — she might be more ill than they knew. He thought with concern of the cold and rain of Friday and Saturday and Phebe's shock at not seeing him. There was no telling what she had suffered. He put on his hat and coat and went out, and at the nearest florist's shop ordered a box of expensive flowers to be delivered by messenger. There were other men ordering flowers, overfed, heavy men of a type which he loathed.

In his room he read Phebe's note again. He remembered her first letter — since it arrived there had happened the most amazing episode in his life. He sat down at his desk and took up his pen and wrote, after a long time, the words, "Darling Phebe." He looked at them earnestly — to this degree he had never committed himself. He would, however, he said, commit himself thus for Phebe. He wrote ardently, almost eloquently, begging her to answer and reassure him. The letter also he sent by special messenger; she would have it in an hour. He asked for a mere word. He would surely hear in the morning.

But he did not hear until Monday, and this envelope, too, was tiny. Was she so ill that she couldn't write in her usual fashion, voluminously, affectionately? He had had dozens of closely written letters. For the first time in his life, his selfish path seemed obstructed.

Phebe's handwriting was firm.

I'm entirely well again. I stayed at Crescent Beach till Sunday, then I went home. I have my final examination to prepare for.

There was neither tender salutation nor affectionate signature; there was still less any grateful acknowledgment of his condescension. His eyes narrowed, his cheeks flamed. He read between the lines a message which Phebe had not put there. She had been in Millerstown — was that the reason for this curtness? He took pen and paper and wrote rapidly.

You have no right to treat me in this fashion. If any one in Millerstown has said anything against me, I wish to know what it is.

When he read this over, he wondered whether he had lost his mind and he tore the paper into twenty pieces. But the impulse to express himself was not exhausted and he began another note.

I'm going to Michigan to-morrow. Late in July, as I told you, I shall be here for a few days, then I go to Europe for several months. If you change your incomprehensible attitude and can explain —

With a curse he sent this fragment after its predecessor.

"She will come creeping back," he said, beginning to pace the floor. "No matter what she has heard she will come creeping back."

Presently he sat down heavily. Ten years ago a woman friend had died, and for an hour he had felt desperate discomfort. But he had had other friends. Now he had cut loose from all.

"But she will come back," he said at last firmly and almost happily. "She will surely come back."

PART VII

PART VII

I

In the doorway of the Dennis house in the twilight sat Phebe, her hands folded in her lap. The trees were in full leaf and the wistaria on the old balconies was in bloom. It was eleven o'clock, and the square, earlier crowded with Italians seeking relief after the first day of summer, was almost empty. Far overhead drifted out the sound of Jerome's music. Obeying the impulse of an idle mood, he followed Schubert's Serenade with the Air for the G String, then he wove a medley of still more popular compositions, as though he selected them because of their beauty and abandoned them because they had been worn thin.

When he ceased to play, a young student of the piano next door began. He possessed talent if not genius and he attacked with stormy fervor the final movement of Ada Haldeman's favorite, Opus 57; then, as if to rest his mind, he played spiritedly a show piece of the moment.

The music gave Phebe no pleasure and the boy's heroic repetitions roused no sympathy. It was the evening of Commencement and she had received her Master's Diploma, a briefer and less elaborate document than the thick parchments awarded her by Leesburg Normal School and Granger College. She had played no organ at this Commencement; she had sat on no platform, observed and admired of all; she had been merely one of hundreds of recipients of diplomas listening to an address. Nor had she an appointment with

Dr. Todd as at Leesburg or any indestructible hopefulness of sometime meeting Crusen as at Granger. The five gentlemen who tested her knowledge and read her essay had been puzzled as Miss Preston had been puzzled. Some spring of vitality seemed to have loosened. Each gave her the high grade he had determined upon before the final tests, but as he did so his conscience was troubled.

Her uneasy mind leaped in a sort of grasshopper fashion from one unwelcome and unhappy thought to another. She could see lovers huddled together on the benches in the park, and she pictured, against her will, lovers wandering in the twilight, hand in hand or arm in arm, and lovers sitting in the sand at the shore under a bright moon. She remembered the moonlight in which she had walked with Hersh, and she could have torn from her side the heart which remembered him at all. She saw Todd's hand lying on his desk. It was as though a great storm had brought to the surface of her consciousness the wreckage of the lowest deep.

She thought of her housemates, finding them all unpleasant. They had horrid mannerisms. Roberts ate in the queer English fashion, holding his fork in his left hand, heaping vegetables upon it with his knife. Miss Carter was slightly palsied, and she had begun to drop her food. One day, calling Phebe mysteriously to her room, she wept because in her old age she must sleep on cotton sheets. The prim tidiness of Flora and Irene and the devotion of Miss Vermilye and Miss Andrews had become irritating. How could Miss Vermilye be fond of Miss Andrews or Miss Andrews fond of Miss Vermilye? How could they whisper together, walk together, sleep together? How could they avoid knowing that the mere sight and sound of them inspired amusement in the observer?

A consideration of her own affairs offered still less relief

for her uneasy mind. Her income was so long overdue that she had been compelled to borrow from Gertrude. Finally, long past the first of the quarter, five hundred dollars arrived instead of a thousand. Meanwhile she had not inquired of the Evening Star Mining Company. She seemed to have lost mental as well as bodily vigor. She had come to New York, not to study, but to be near Crusen, and he was lost to her, and study had no charm and its reward no value. In brighter moments she longed for a new experience utterly unlike love, utterly unlike anything she had ever felt. But nothing interesting would happen to her now.

Of Crusen she thought with one emotion, torturing jealousy both of those persons with whom he now associated and of those with whom he had associated in the past. His caressing hand was not that of a novice. She remembered unwillingly sentiments which he had casually expressed, light, cynical opinions which she had ignored when they were uttered, but which she now found graven upon her memory. "It has always been my principle," he had said, smiling, "to have more than one anchor to windward." He did not believe in goodness, and he had at his tongue's end a hundred illustrations to prove that chastity and genius never abode together, and that constancy and domesticity and the other dull virtues of a monogamous life were not possible to human beings of intelligence and spirit. She had not heard from him, nor had she written to him. He was now, she supposed, in the West, and by and by he would go to England.

Jealousy did not end with Crusen; it clouded all other relations of life, even her purest and best affection, that for Beulah. Beulah had everything and she nothing. In her worst moments she imputed to Beulah an unworthy sense of triumph.

Jealousy extended to Ambrose Weidner and Ada Haldeman, for whom she did not care. Standing in her favorite alcove in Tolstoi's store, she saw the two enter. They said a gay word to Tolstoi, then walked past him and his untidy desk, past the heaps of books on the floor, past Phebe standing with her back turned. She heard a distant door open and close. Where had they gone? Had Tolstoi a department to which others were admitted and from which she was shut out? Perhaps Gertrude met Ambrose and Ada in this secret room. She hated them all. Ada was distinguished, but Ambrose and Gertrude had no right to special favors.

She had but one consolation — her escapade was not and never could be suspected. At Crescent Beach they did not know her name and she would never venture within a hundred miles of Crescent Beach again. Sometimes she woke at night after a bad dream and cried with relief because no one would ever know.

Rising wearily to go into the house, she met Valentine Levering coming out. The Daubs were in the country and Valentine's evenings were free. He was still pursued and still unwilling to be captured. He had taken Eileen's hand again and had held it longer and a little more closely, and he had accepted a pair of cuff-links in each of which lurked a diamond as large as Eileen dared make it. The camel had his ears in now as well as his nose, but Valentine still believed his tent empty of all but himself. For reasons which had nothing to do with Eileen, he was desperately unhappy.

Walking lazily, his hands in his pockets, he faced Phebe in the doorway. With a pretty woman at hand he could not be altogether wretched; if Eileen had had a little more beauty she would have been successful long ago.

"Oh, don't go in!" he begged.

Phebe halted, blushing, and looking up at him. When

people came upon her suddenly, she was disturbed as though they could see into her unhappy heart.

"Why not?"

"It's stuffy in the house. It's old, and all the people are old, and you and I are young. Sit with me or walk with me."

Phebe had never been pleaded with in just this tender, half-childish tone. She looked up and met Valentine's beautiful brown eyes.

"I'm too tired to walk," she said, amused.

"Then sit down. I'll get you a cushion. Please stay! It can't be that wonderful Phebe is tired!"

Valentine fetched an armful of cushions and made her and himself comfortable. She sat looking forward, her hands clasped; he leaned back against the wall regarding her earnestly.

"I always think of you as tireless, fadeless. I think about you a great deal, but you never show your real self. You talk eloquently, but it's never about Phebe Stannard. The moment I saw you I was intrigued. I thought you the most interesting girl I had ever met."

Phebe laughed aloud for the first time in many weeks. But even fulsome compliments were welcome to a humiliated spirit.

"Especially when you took me to the theater and I didn't speak."

"Even your silence had its charm. Anybody else would have chattered and would have lost all that wonderful first impression. I wish my mind were as fresh as that. No matter what anybody else may do for you, I took you to see your first play."

"How are you getting on with your own plays?"

"There you are, charming again!" said Valentine. He straightened his shoulders and leaned forward. "May I tell you my last plot?"

"Certainly."

The moon looked down at his handsome figure as if quizzically.

"This is it," said he. "Rather it is the main idea. My heroine gives up everything for fame — her family, youth, health, friends, everything. She succeeds superbly. Everything turns to gold under her hand, her books are written in a style which makes them admired by intellectual people, and at the same time their plots are adapted to the stage and the moving picture, so dramatic is her interpretation of life. But she realizes in the end that she has no one to enjoy her fame with her, literally no one, except the hangers-on who expect to share her profits, and she has made or kept no friends. There is not a living soul who is unselfishly glad she has won. In despair she destroys her masterpiece and then herself."

Phebe was shocked.

"Oh, don't kill her off!" she begged. "Let her have her fame, too, after she's learned her lesson. Have one person, a lover, perhaps unsuspected, stand by her!" Then, losing her zeal, Phebe smiled. Was this a statement of what Valentine believed to be his own problem?

"But you'd ruin it!" argued Valentine. "I didn't think you'd be one to demand a happy ending against the probabilities of life." He talked on and on to half-attentive ears. "People don't have everything — you surely have found that out!"

"Yes," said Phebe.

"And most have nothing."

"Yes," agreed Phebe sadly.

After a while Margaret Dennis opened the door, and spoke in a sweet, motherly, sleepy tone. All that were in her house were her children.

"Don't let that boy keep you up too late, my dear. Will you remind him to lock the door?"

"All right, Miss Margaret," said Valentine. "Do you think the idea is clear?"

"Perfectly," said Phebe, rising.

Valentine rose also and looked down at her.

"May I show you the manuscript?"

"Certainly."

"You have a fine mind. I don't mean the kind of mind which can get only learned degrees; I hate that kind. I mean a fine, original mind. Have you ever wanted to write?"

"Once," answered Phebe. "I wrote a poem, and that cured me."

"I believe you could be anything you wished to be."

Phebe's laugh was almost hysterical, it was so tired and so merry. Valentine caught her by the shoulders and held her fast.

"Surely you know that you're clever and learned and lovely, a sort of Portia, or a sort of Eloise! You have a darling face, at once bright and grave and expressive and composed. I've been studying your profile — it's as pure and clear as though it were cut out of delicate stone. You're the sort of person whom everybody wants and few can have. Gertrude has you, but I am on the outside."

Phebe leaned her weight back against his hands and looked up at him, still laughing.

"There's your curtain speech!" she cried. "Go on! I'll remember everything and write it down for you."

"You're too cruel," protested Valentine. "I've been in love with you ever since you came and you look at me as though I were a gamboling dog. Here I am at this moment making you a solemn declaration and you're shaking with mirth."

"I am, indeed." Phebe moved from under his loosening hands.

"You think I'm talking nonsense."

"I do," said Phebe. "Good-night."

Ready for bed, she went to the window. Valentine had stayed on the steps, and the scent of his cigarette rose on the still air. She was tired and sleepy, but she stood for fifteen minutes in meditation. Valentine made a charming lover — what a pity that he wasted himself on Eileen! He ought to be protected from her lures. There was in Phebe's eyes exactly the same expression of sleepy maternity that there had been in Margaret Dennis's. Here, perhaps, was a new experience, utterly unlike love, which should take her outside herself. At least she had been beguiled for an hour.

II

Phebe and Valentine walked up and down the sand at Long Beach. He had invited her to go with him on a dozen excursions, and she consented in the idle and purposeless spirit in which she spent her days, treating him as though he were a child or the gamboling dog to which he compared himself. He laid his arm across her shoulders or took her hand and she laughed and did not resist. Hitherto, mentally, at least, she had offered herself to her lovers; here was a lover who offered himself to her. It was a pleasant and amusing experience.

Gertrude was surprised, but she was far more disturbed by Phebe's idleness than by her philandering. It was not like Phebe to be idle. Why did she not register for a summer course? She observed that Phebe received no more letters or telegrams and seemed to expect none.

Valentine and Phebe sat down on the sand facing the blue sea. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the sapphire plain

was as smooth as the white sand. This was a different sea from that at Crescent Beach; it was unshadowed by clouds, unshrouded by mists. Phebe sat with her chin on her hand, her heart for the moment as quiet as her eyes, and both as quiet as the sea.

Valentine stretched himself out, his head on Phebe's skirt.

"I'm in perfect despair," he said after a long silence.

"Are you?" said Phebe. "Why? What have you to despair about?"

"What have I to despair about?" he repeated. "Phebe, do you know the name of my ancestral home?"

"Your ancestral home is New York."

Valentine sat up. "No!" he cried dramatically. "I come from New Jerusalem, near Kankakee, Michigan."

Phebe smiled. "I come from Millerstown."

"There's no comparison; Millerstown is the East, New Jerusalem, the West. Do you remember a story about a man who accompanied the body of a beloved friend and master, a famous sculptor, to his home in the West? Do you remember the darkness and the rain and the slippery boardwalks and the mud and the awful people who came to stare?"

"Yes," said Phebe. "I remember."

"That is exactly New Jerusalem. My parents died when I was eighteen, and I took my inheritance and came here. That was ten years ago. I've worked like a dog, and now, just as I'm beginning to have some success, I must stop."

"What's the trouble?"

"Money gone, haven't a penny," declared Valentine. "It's horrible. You don't know anything about it. You've never been afraid of being cast into the street. I'm not only without money, but I'm in debt. I owe Roberts and Jerome each a little, and by the end of the month I'll owe Miss Margaret.

I'm certain that if I could have leisure and peace of mind to get this one play done I'd succeed."

"You have no resources at all?" asked Phebe.

"No," said Valentine. Suddenly he flushed scarlet. "If I thought you were alluding to matrimony, I'd lay you back in the sand and three times your little throat around, your lovely yellow hair I'd 'wound.'" There were tears in Valentine's voice.

Phebe sat perfectly silent. A warm spot in her heart seemed to grow larger. The color rose to her cheek.

"Will you let me lend a hand?" she asked, as though she had millions. "I can let you have three or four hundred dollars if that will help."

"It will save my art and my reason," answered Valentine. "You are the dearest, sweetest, loveliest creature in the world. Will you have me if I do succeed?"

"By no means," said Phebe heartily.

III

PHEBE opened the door of the Dennis house and came out on the steps. She was watching for the second delivery of mail which was due at eleven-thirty, but which was late. It was the last week in September and the graduate courses at Columbia opened in October. She hoped to return, and she thought with envy of the students who were to sit under the five gentlemen who were to be looked upon as teachers, not as men. But hope was far removed from expectation. Her pocketbook was almost empty, her bank balance was one dollar and ninety-seven cents, and she owed Gertrude fifty dollars and in a few days would owe Margaret Dennis eighty. She had written twice to the Evening Star Mining Company, but had had no answer, though she sent her second letter by registered mail and received a receipt.

She saw the postman turning the corner and hurried down the steps to meet him. She ran the bundle of letters through her fingers — for so large a household the mail was always light. Now there were not a dozen letters and none was for her.

In sudden panic she ran upstairs and put on her hat and hurried to the Brevoort and telegraphed to the Evening Star Mining Company. Returning she sat by her window awaiting the announcement of lunch. The house was very still. From Miss Carter's room there came often for hours at a time no sign of life. Since their excursion to Long Beach, Valentine had scarcely left his room except for meals, and when he appeared it was with pale cheeks and hair carelessly smoothed down, as though he were desperately wooing a stubborn muse. This morning he had left the house early.

Phebe ate a quiet meal with Miss Carter and Margaret and Mary, then she rode on the top of a Riverside Drive bus to the terminus of the line and returned on the same bus. The air was clear, but she felt oppressed. By this time it was four o'clock and she stopped for Gertrude whose day ended at five, compelling herself to read a French journal while she waited.

From the newsboy at Fifth Avenue Gertrude bought an evening paper; then they climbed nimbly to their favorite perch, Gertrude at least looking young, self-confident, and happy. She held the newspaper in her hand as she chattered, and presently she saw that Phebe was staring at it with startled eyes.

"What's the matter?"

Phebe seized the paper and spread it out on her knee.

"For Heaven's sake!" cried Gertrude explosively.

From the unfolded sheet there looked up somewhat solemnly the familiar faces of Valentine Levering and Eileen Daub —

Eileen Levering she was now. Phebe read the word "Married" and she heard, uttered with a squeal of laughter, "Caught!"

"She's got him!" cried Gertrude. She laughed until pedestrians looked up from the street. "I've won a box of candy from Jerome, and a pair of gloves from Roberts. The bets have been on for two years."

Phebe hated her laughter and hated her. The mild salve she had applied to her aching heart was stolen from her.

"It's a calamity," she said sharply.

"Nothing of the kind," contradicted Gertrude, still laughing. "He thinks, poor soul, that he's a genius. Now he'll have something to blame failure on. Besides, he'll have compensations, motors and country houses and travel. I give him six months to think himself the happiest man in the world."

"He'll probably shoot himself," said Phebe wildly.

"Shoot himself!" Gertrude became almost hysterical. "My dear, he's reconciled already. Think of it — ten million dollars! That would reconcile one to anything."

"You don't believe that," protested Phebe. "And you haven't any real interest in him!"

"Oh, yes, I have," said Gertrude easily. "But his marrying or not marrying is none of my business."

"You said once," began Phebe wildly and irrelevantly, "that it was cruel for him to be here with these women, it was hard on them."

"Was I so foolish?" laughed Gertrude. "I know better now."

Phebe said no more. Valentine's defection hurt her cruelly and Gertrude's good-humor offended her. She stood back sullenly to let Gertrude enter the house, and Gertrude, oblivious to her ill-temper, accompanied her up the stairs talking

all the while. From the second floor she shouted out the news, and was answered by opening doors and a chorus of laughing comments. The women were all, like Gertrude, intensely amused.

On Phebe's table lay two letters, one postmarked New York, one Blaine, Montana. From the first fluttered a check for four hundred dollars, written on paper of a peculiar dull blue. She heard Gertrude entering, and she hurriedly stooped to pick it up, but Gertrude saw her and laughed again, holding in her hand a strip of the same dull blue paper.

"He has a bank account already — *Vater* Daub's wedding gift. He told you, too, did he, about his unhappy lot?"

Phebe did not answer — Gertrude's laugh was stinging salt upon a raw wound. She opened her second letter and held it out.

"Perhaps you won't find this so funny."

Gertrude sobered instantly. From the euphuisms of the Evening Star Mining Company she learned that payment of both dividends and interest was indefinitely suspended.

"This can't mean that your income has ceased!" she cried.

"That's exactly what it means. I have in all this world four hundred dollars. When I've paid you and Miss Margaret, I shall have two hundred and seventy."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" cried Gertrude. "You needn't think of me, and Aunt Margaret will wait. But, Phebe! You might have had a fellowship. Or you might have carried on some courses and secretarial work at the same time. Didn't you think of it?"

Phebe's heart sank lower and lower.

"It isn't a question of what I might have done. It's what I can do now."

"Well, I wouldn't worry," said Gertrude earnestly. "You're always busy whether you need to be or not, and it's more fun to be busy and earn money."

"But what can I do?" asked Phebe, a white circle round her mouth.

"You can certainly teach till something turns up."

"In New York?" asked Phebe hopelessly. "I can never find a position here."

"Of course you can, eventually if not now. Even if you have to go away for a while, you can come back."

"That is so," said Phebe quietly. She saw the hateful blanks of teachers' agencies which in the spring fluttered through the Leesburg Normal School and Granger College. She remembered also Gertrude's long servitude, and wondered why Gertrude did not think of it herself.

PART VIII

PART VIII

I

AGAIN the postman was late, and this time Phebe determined not to wait for him. From the steps she looked drearily about. The gray sky and the cold air seemed those of December or January, rather than of early November. It was what the inmates of the Dennis house called Ash Wednesday on account of the municipal collections, and the carts, passing a few moments ago, had left a carpet of papers on the street and a cloud of fine ashes in the air. Phebe blinked her eyes to rid them of the stinging particles. Two weeks ago she had applied to a teachers' agency and had been assured that she would find a position promptly. She had not made application until she had exhausted all possibilities at the University. Next year she might have a fellowship, but in the meantime she must live. Gertrude had been indefatigable; she worked for Phebe almost night and day, and her inexhaustible energy wearied the object for which it was exerted.

Phebe had filled out lengthy blanks, and, modest though she was, they proved her an accomplished person. She read them, however, without enthusiasm. She still disliked teaching, and she recalled Granger College in its darkest aspect. In her dreams she saw emaciated, earnest Dean Preston, and fled through dark caverns from Professor Bland, and felt her gorge rise at the effusiveness of Miss Birely. She smelled the acid odors of the laboratory and the stale food from the dining-room. To Granger she would never go, though Granger would welcome her back.

At the corner she looked about. Macdougal Street was indescribably dingy and forlorn, and the courts and alleys so prized by curiosity-seekers shabby and unclean. She had no object except to keep in motion and thus avoid the necessity for thinking, and she walked west and then south. Her thoughts still found no resting-place. No Valentine Levering was at hand to flatter and cajole. Valentine and his new family had sailed for France taking two cars and two chauffeurs. Every one in the house had received a wedding announcement so heavy that four cents postage was required to carry it. When Valentine fetched his belongings in one of the largest Daub cars, Phebe saw it stop and closed her door into the hall.

From Millerstown she averted her thoughts. She would soon have to tell them of her loss and of her new prospects, provided there were new prospects. The thought of Millerstown brought inevitably the thought of Crusen, who had probably found a new love even younger than herself. The possibility was intolerable, but still she did not creep back.

Even the comfort of soporific exercise seemed about to be denied her. Yesterday she had felt a callous spot on each sole, and she discovered that her walking boots were growing thin. They had cost twenty dollars and she could not replace them.

In spite of her footsore condition she walked down Seventh Avenue and Varick Street, passing near Ambrose's church and crossing to Broadway. The wind blew more raw and cold and the faces of the crowd grew forbidding. No one had any consideration for her comfort; Phebe, the independent, was jostled, and could have wept with irritation. She had intended vaguely to visit the Custom House and the Aquarium, but when she reached Battery Park, the frolicking seals had no charm, and she took the Subway and returned.

Climbing out at Astor Place, she went toward Tolstoi's store with a sudden longing for the homely, high-ceiled, crowded place. Even the glaring light looked inviting after the gray-green of the dull sky. But from the opposite side, when her foot was already on the curb, she saw Ambrose and Ada Haldeman. They did not cling together as she clung to Crusen, they walked a little apart in comradely fashion. Whether they were lovers or merely comrades, they were the last persons in the world she wished to see. As she turned away, a stinging snowflake touched her cheek and brought tears. The very heavens seemed to abuse her. She went homeward, her head down, walking heavily as a tired tramp might travel on a country road.

She spied, before she closed the door, a letter on the hall table addressed to her with the card of the agency in the corner. Opening it, she saw, amazed, an enclosure in a familiar hand and read with a sense of outrage a letter from Todd.

By chance his application for a teacher to take the place of a young woman who was leaving on December 1 had reached the agency at the same time as Phebe's letter. The position was that of assistant in the department of English and music, and for this Todd felt, and the agency felt, Phebe was peculiarly fitted.

Phebe had thought of and had rejected Granger College, but she had never thought of the Leesburg Normal School. She remembered the tiny bedrooms, the tower-like addition to which one went to fill one's pitcher and to bathe, the untidy servants' rooms opposite the practice rooms in the basement.

Leesburg! To see Todd daily, to recall her hateful imaginings! To Leesburg she would never go. But to Leesburg she might have to go.

II

PHEBE left the Dennis house carrying two letters in her muff. She had waited a week to answer the agency, and in the meantime Gertrude had made fresh efforts in her behalf. Gertrude was frightened by Phebe's white face. She surmised that Phebe had suffered some blow to her heart; this lassitude and depression could not have their origin in loss of her money alone. She did not expect Phebe to confide in her; she confided the history of her own heart to no one.

One of Phebe's letters was addressed to the agency, the other to Todd. She said in both that she would accept the position. There was a box at the corner, and she meant to drop the letters there, but when she reached it, despair stayed her hand. She would wait another hour. Mails were collected as late as midnight, and it was now only three o'clock. She walked on, her hands folded, her muff held close to her breast, her shoulders bent. Before her went a man with a strange, shuffling walk; she saw that he was drunk, and to escape passing him she turned toward the east. On the Bowery she went southward till she reached the entrance of the Manhattan Bridge, and, although it was growing dark, she entered the footpath and started across. The clouds hung low, and presently a mist enfolded her, half hiding the dark oily water and the myriad lights beneath her. At the middle of the bridge, she turned. The soles of her feet ached; she, tireless Phebe Stannard, must get home and take off her shoes and lie down.

But for a long time she did not stir. The dim outlines of the buildings had entirely disappeared, and she looked at a vast mountain, illuminated from within. Every instant new lights twinkled out by thousands, as though a stupendous brush were stippling a dark canvas with gold. She gazed until

the illumination was complete; then she walked toward the city, crying because she must go away.

Again the Subway brought her to the neighborhood of Tolstoi's store, and she looked in. Beyond tables laden with books rose his fine head. She would go in for the last time, and if she was able bid him good-bye.

Tolstoi was at his hated task of dictating, his soft voice high and peevish. The henna-colored coiffure had been replaced by a long succession of blacks and browns and other hennas. That which bent over the machine at present was copper-colored and had the shape of an enormous open fan. He saw Phebe coming and made a little grimace of impatience. He, too, wondered what ailed Phebe, and he suspected that her trouble had some connection with her friend whom he disliked.

Phebe entered her alcove and stood still. Here she had found her "Dreamthorp"; here she had gradually and triumphantly assembled her almost complete collection of first American editions of Henry James; here she had found her beautifully printed old Lambs and Hazlitts; here Crusen had taken from the shelf "The Romany Rye," touching it gingerly with his immaculate hand. Suddenly she could see only parts of names and a wavering, dancing line where the horizontal edge of the shelf should be. Her trembling hand sought to seize this waving appearance and steady herself. Was she going to fall? Surely she was not going to cry! She straightened her shoulders. What nonsense! Let her fix her mind intently upon these books and control herself, or let her get away quickly into the air. To faint would be humiliating enough, but to cry would be worse. Her face began to twitch, and she bowed it upon her arm and laid her arm upon the shelf. Tears blinded her; and in an instant she was crying bitterly.

Presently a shop-boy stood staring. After a moment he went and whispered to Tolstoi, "There's something wrong with a lady in there," nodding his head toward Phebe's alcove. At once Tolstoi dropped his letters and, pushing his chair toward Phebe, saw with relief that at least she was upright. He addressed her in keen concern.

"Are you not well, Miss Stannard?"

Phebe's power of speech was gone. Tolstoi moved closer.

"Are you in physical pain?"

When Phebe contrived to shake her head, Tolstoi rolled his chair back so that she could pass.

"Go to the end of the store and there beside where the ladies work is a door. Open it and you will find a place to rest."

Phebe felt rather than saw her way. A bookcase hid her from Elizabeth and Miss Moffatt, but she could hear their gentle voices. Miss Moffatt had some months ago made up her mind to resign herself to age. For weeks she wore her hat even while she was at work, and when she took it off one morning her hair was snow-white. Elizabeth said nothing, but Tolstoi cried out like a child, "How beautiful you look!" Since then his chair had been to Miss Moffatt, not a prison of necessity, but a kingly throne.

Phebe stood for a moment inside the door without being able to see anything. Then her vision was restored in what seemed a magical fashion. She was in a large, low, dimly lighted room, lined with books, not in the comparatively dull bindings of the vast collection outside, but in red and gold and rich brown. She felt under her feet a thick rug and saw deep chairs and strange old cabinets. Beyond was a paved, glass-enclosed court, also dimly lighted, latticed by trailing stems of ivy and with a tall urn in the center filled with a hundred plants of narcissus just coming into bloom. There was a faint odor of tobacco, of incense, of old books, of flowers.

Amazed and moving carefully as though the place might vanish at a touch, Phebe sat down on an ancient chair. Even the fire of cannel coal was new and strange. For a few moments she felt only a deep pleasure, her body in the warmth, her eye in the colors. The impulse to cry passed with a last convulsive motion of her throat. This, then, was the secret place where Ambrose and Ada Haldeman came! Doubtless Gertrude and Elizabeth knew all about it. Suddenly she realized that her enjoyment was unlike anything she had ever felt. She had loved the fields and the little mountain and the flaming torch of the furnace when she had loved Hersh, but when she had been robbed of him, she had loved none of them. She had loved books and her organ when she had wished to impress Todd, but when he had failed her, they became as nothing. She had loved a thousand aspects and objects seen during the last year because she had loved Crusen, but when he went away, the glory went with him. But this lovely place was, for a few moments at least, sufficient in itself.

She turned to observe the room more carefully. She remembered hearing Tolstoi say to a customer, "You can't have it: I want it for myself," and she supposed him angling for a higher price. She had thought of him only as a clever merchant, generous to her because she was Gertrude's friend and because Gertrude had the buying of many books, but he was clearly a connoisseur and collector as well. Her limited knowledge was sufficient to discern that here were books of great value.

But books were not the only treasures. There were a few small, exquisite tapestries with shepherds and shepherdesses eyeing one another and rabbits skipping upon flowery meads; there was a mediæval chest of fine contour, an old priory table on which were ancient wrought candlesticks, and,

hanging where they reflected the firelight, plates of Nuremberg brass. Phebe could not even assign the various objects to the period in which they belonged, but she recognized their unity, and surmised that they were, like the books, above price.

She heard, after a while, the creak of Tolstoi's chair and the awkward opening of the door. Early in their acquaintance she had once sprung to help him, but she had soon learned that he did not wish to be helped. She remembered Leesburg and her calm was broken. Hating herself, she began to cry. Tolstoi pushed his chair in and closed the door.

"I am an old man," he said in his soft voice. "Perhaps I can help you. Is it death that brings you sorrow?"

Phebe shook her head.

"Well, then, it is not the worst," he said cheerfully. "Everything else can be overcome. And you can't have lost all your friends because you still have Miss Gertrude. And you have me, if I can help you. Have you lost property?"

"That is partly the trouble," stammered Phebe, finding her voice.

"Oh, ho!" said Tolstoi. "That is not the worst either. You are young and smart and you have good health — haven't you?"

"Yes," acknowledged Phebe, ashamed. "The chief trouble is I must leave New York. I shall have to teach, and I haven't found a position here."

"Do you like to teach?"

"No," said Phebe heartily. "I haven't any patience. It's a bad defect, I know."

Tolstoi looked frowning at the fire.

"I tell you what you do," he said after a long time. "You go home now and eat your supper and this evening you come

back. I have a proposition to make, but I haven't it ready in my mind. You come back and rattle the door hard. Even if it looks dark, somebody will hear you. Miss Moffatt comes often in the evenings. I think she will die here. Now, you will surely come back?"

Phebe rose, her letters in her hand.

"I had these ready saying that I would take a position in Pennsylvania. Do you mean I'm not to mail them?"

Tolstoi pushed himself out ahead of her.

"Not till to-morrow, anyhow. When you hear me you will perhaps say, 'That is a crazy man, he should be locked up.' You take Miss Dennis home; then they won't have to fetch her. And you eat a good supper. Everything seems better when we have eaten. And you come back."

"Oh, I'll come back," promised Phebe.

III

PHEBE returned to Tolstoi's store, but she forbade herself to hope and she carried her letters in her muff. Miss Moffatt showed her to a chair by Tolstoi's desk, which was illuminated by a shaded lamp and heaped with piles of letters, and presently from the rear of the store Tolstoi pushed his chair to her side. His face was white, and she wondered suddenly whether he suffered physical pain. But his bright eyes smiled.

"You came?" he said.

"Of course," said Phebe.

On his lap were three books. He lifted the uppermost and opened it at random.

"You will not mind if we have a little examination, a mere formality? You read me first a little in German, then in English."

Phebe smiled; this was an easy task:

Der Eichwald brauset, die Wolken ziehn,
Das Mägdlein sitzet am Ufers grün;
Es bricht sich die Welle mit Macht, mit Macht,
Und sie seufzt hinaus in die finstre Nacht,
Das Auge von Weinen getrübet:

"Das Herz ist gestorben, die Welt ist leer,
Und weiter giebt sie dem Wunsche nichts mehr.
Du Heilige, rufe dein Kind zurück,
Ich habe genossen das irdische Glück,
Ich habe gelebt und geliebet!"

"Now English," said Tolstoi.

Phebe glanced at him sharply, suspecting some discerning mischief in his selection. But that was nonsense; he had offered her the first poem upon which his eye fell.

The oakwood rustles, the clouds move, the maiden sits on the green bank. The mighty waves break and she looks out into the dark night, her eyes blinded by tears. She cries, "My heart is dead, the world is empty, nevermore will a wish of mine be satisfied. Thou Holy One, summon thy child, I have enjoyed all earthly pleasure, I have lived and loved."

"A little free, but that's what it means," she said, conscious of an inward convulsion, like the beginning of mirth.

"Now this," said Tolstoi, passing her another book. "In English."

"I know a metrical version," said Phebe, a gleam of unmistakable mischief in her eye.

"Seek not, Leuconoë, to know how long you're going to live yet,
What boons the gods will yet withhold, or what they're going to give yet;
For Jupiter will have his way, despite how much we worry, —
Some will hang on for many a day, and some die in a hurry.
The wisest thing for you to do is to embark this diem
Upon a merry escapade with some such bard as I am.
And while we sport I'll reel you off such odes as shall surprise ye;
To-morrow when the headache comes, — well, then I'll satirize ye!"

"The spirit if not the words," commented Tolstoi. "Now this."

"Many are underneath the water," translated Phebe. "Their sighs move the surface. They say, 'We were sad in the blessed sunshine, and now are we fixed here.'"

Tolstoi looked at her with bright points of light in his soft eyes.

"Yes," he said. "That was once a warning to me. Now French, of course, you know well."

"Yes," said Phebe.

"You are very learned."

"Indeed, I'm not!" protested Phebe. "You've happened on languages I had to have for my degree."

"Well, we need have no examination in French. Now here is a little English." He handed Phebe a letter which read:

Dear Sir, — We can secure for you the London edition of Jane Austin for $150.00. It is fairly rare.

"Do you find that correct?"

"'Austin' is a misspelling."

Tolstoi handed her another.

Dear Sir, — The set you wish can easily to-morrow be had by me for $10.00, so I could not pay you $50.00 for yours.

Phebe smiled. "It's a little awkward."

"Oh, you think so!" said Tolstoi. "Well, I myself wrote it. I have lost good sales on account of awkwardness and saying what I do not mean. I make my money from my mail business; I make nothing from impertinent young ladies who expect something for nothing. I do not doubt that you think you could say what I mean better than I can say it myself."

"I'm sure I could," said Phebe boldly.

"You can use a machine?"

"Yes."

"Well, now that you have criticized my language, tell me what you think of my store. I heard you whisper insulting things once to Miss Gertrude."

Phebe laughed almost merrily.

"Your letters should be filed. I dare say your romantic disorder is a lure to passers-by, but disorder on your desk must be very inconvenient."

"Just go on," said Tolstoi, folding his hands.

"The English alcove could be greatly improved. The customers who go there are looking for particular books and they want to find them quickly. It's so with all the special alcoves."

"Anything else?"

"Lots," said Phebe.

"Well, then. Let us go where it is pleasanter." Tolstoi seized the arms of his chair and propelled himself down the aisle, talking steadily. "You see, this is my parlor back here. Now, find yourself a chair. I planned this place for poor, clever fellows, who have only hall bedrooms. Some of those that you see hanging round here are poor as mice. It is to be a secret place; only those come who are invited and they tell nobody. Miss Elizabeth knows and Miss Gertrude and Miss Moffatt and Miss Haldeman and your friend Mr. Weidner. Miss Haldeman collected these fancy things at bargains for me, but she tells me they would sell for thousands. I would not pay thousands for them, believe me! Now I want a pleasant somebody to be here all the time, to have a desk and work here, write my letters here, for instance, and be a sort of information bureau. I am not learned. In the afternoon we will have a little tea for the thirsty. You get my meaning?"

"Yes," said Phebe.

"Are you a pleasant person?"

"I'm going to be. I haven't been always."

"And you would be willing to write my letters and make yourself an information bureau?"

"If I'm smart enough."

"You seem to have a fairly good mind," said Tolstoi dryly. "I would pay you a living wage to begin, then we will go up if we suit each other. I will have a good helper and if there is something wrong yet besides losing your property, you will cure yourself with work. Now in the morning you can tell me how you decide."

"I can tell you now."

"No, tell me in the morning. You sleep on it and, if you want to try it, you come back. You may think differently by daylight of this disorderly place and this queer old man."

"It is a beautiful place," declared Phebe.

Tolstoi looked round with profound satisfaction. "Miss Haldeman will tell you all about these things so you can talk learnedly."

"And you are not old," declared Phebe as she rose. "You are not as old as I am." She elevated her voice above Tolstoi's soft "Ho, ho!" "And if you are queer, then I wish that everybody was queer." With this valedictory and a few tears Phebe made for the door.

IV

PHEBE was trying on a finished gown, a sort of uniform of dark blue with interchangeable white cuffs and collars. The little dressmaker was as deft and timid and clever as Vinnie and she was like Vinnie in admiring Phebe. She had a clouded mirror, and Phebe avoided looking into it with a queer anticipation of something disturbing. The little dressmaker watched her uneasily, fearing her work was not well done.

"If it isn't right I'll change it gladly."

Phebe smoothed down her skirt. The dress was made of a new material called tricotine which was said to be everlasting.

"It's exactly right," she assured the little woman, who in a moment protested at her pay.

"This is more than I asked!"

"It's the week before Christmas," said Phebe. "Get yourself a present."

She took the box under her arm and started home. Tolstoi paid her well and she had been able to keep her room at the Dennis's. Moreover, the Evening Star Mining Company declared in an optimistic circular that it had not set beyond the hope of rising. She walked slowly, her head down as though she still feared something unpleasant. What she dreaded was her own mirror. As soon as she got to her room, she would put the dress on and know the worst.

She felt a physical weariness for which she was grateful. In the first three weeks of her position with Tolstoi she had rearranged half the English section, sorting out hopelessly unsalable books and beginning an alphabetical arrangement. Tolstoi looked askance at a pail of hot water carried by his shop-boy to the top of a ladder. He protested, but when Phebe had gone, he sat contemplating her work with admiration. He believed he had done a smart thing in engaging her.

"The Gentiles will believe her," he said. Then he sighed, "But she is one who could make a home."

In low moments Phebe grieved and despaired, believing that youth was past. She saw herself growing old in Tolstoi's store, dying, and leaving her small accumulated fortune to Gertrude and to Beulah's children. She had not yet got rid of Crusen; the habit of thinking of him was too long estab-

lished and too intensively cultivated. For seven years she had waked in the morning remembering him and had laid her cheek on her hand at night hoping to dream of him. Thoughts of him had been an undercurrent to her whole day. She had looked at the world through his eyes, his opinions were hers, his tastes, his likes and dislikes.

In brighter and far rarer moments she considered, not without pleasure, a new mode of life in which friends and books should be everything and love nothing. Gertrude had begun to talk of their going abroad.

"You can save enough in a few years. That will be the climax of your life."

Her usefulness to Tolstoi gave her unmixed pleasure. Between the fire and the court he placed an old carved desk, and in its cupboards she gathered with Gertrude's assistance a collection of reference books, of catalogues and library bulletins and cumulative indexes.

"She has system," said Tolstoi to himself. "Education can be sometimes a good thing."

Many of the famous persons whom she knew by sight came regularly to the beautiful room. A few read, but most sat quietly before the fire. Sometimes Tolstoi gave her a brief account of her visitors. Salmon the essayist had a shrew of a wife who was jealous into the bargain, and who followed him occasionally even into this sanctuary. Laing, who was twenty-five years old and had leaped into fame with his "Mr. Tucker," had only a brief period left him in which to taste its delight. One lung, Tolstoi said, was gone and the other fast going; but he preferred short shrift in New York to a commuted sentence on some distant highland. He came and went cheerfully, and sometimes he brought flowers for Phebe's desk.

Ambrose appeared only occasionally. The first time he

looked at Phebe with amazement, but she made no explanation of her presence. She supposed that Tolstoi would explain, or perhaps Gertrude would tell Ada Haldeman, who would in turn tell him. He sat near her in a chair before the fire, his slender hands turning the leaves of a book, and, secure in her position a little behind his shoulder, she looked at him earnestly. His brown hair was still thick even above his temples — Phebe was studying all faces for signs of age — and she saw for the first time that he had a straight nose and a fine mouth.

Regarding him, Phebe wished that she might ask him about his life and its principles. Why had he become a minister? Why, having a fine church, had he left it to preach in a church echoing with emptiness? He had peace of mind — one could tell it from his eyes — how did he win and preserve it? She grew suddenly pale and leaned forward. She would like to tell him her troubles and ask for his talisman. She cleared her throat and tightened her grasp on the edge of her desk. But suddenly she remembered that she had left him on the last Sunday in April with the impression that she would return, and it was now December. She grew confused and leaned back clasping her hands. She would like to play the organ — the thought of music was no longer intolerable, but she could not play unless he asked her.

But he did not ask her. He made a few notes and replaced the French book on the shelf and said good-morning pleasantly and went away. She lifted her head and stared out into the court at the narcissus now in the fullness of bloom, and beyond at the gently falling snow. She rose and began to pace up and down, in her heart a dreadful jealousy of Ambrose's happiness. She knew why he was content — religion was the controlling principle of his life. He might be

deluded, but he was enviable. She believed that she had sloughed off religion in her youth; she did not understand that she could never slough it off.

Ada Haldeman gave her a *catalogue raisonné* of Tolstoi's treasures. She was friendly now as though some cause for distrust had been removed, and her lovely eyes looked directly at Phebe. One day she said casually, "It was this tapestry that Mr. Weidner described in his column."

"What column?" asked Phebe quickly, and then stupidly, "What Mr. Weidner?"

Ada explained, not with the resentment of their first meeting, but with satisfaction in Phebe's ignorance.

"Mr. Weidner writes an editorial column every Saturday for 'The Times,' a little essay in very beautiful English."

"I didn't know," confessed Phebe.

She believed that she understood why Ambrose had left his great church — he had used the ministry merely as a stepping-stone to another profession.

Carrying her box she entered the Dennis house at eight o'clock and climbed to her room. She determined that what was to be done should be done at once, and she unfastened her dress before she took off her hat. She put on the new dress and hooked it slowly and crossed the room and turned the light high and looked into her mirror. Her image was exactly what she expected it to be, mature, quiet, a little sorrowful. Her neck above the white collar had a delicacy which she believed was not the delicacy of youth. She leaned forward with both hands on the bureau, looking long with sober yet astonished eyes. She must get used to herself, for thus would she be forever. She believed that at this moment she stepped into middle age.

Her meditations were interrupted by the distant sound of the telephone bell. It startled her, faint as it was, and

she turned and stood waiting. The maid climbed the stairs and knocked on her door.

"Miss Stannard, there's a call for you."

She ran down dressed as she was. Her hand trembled and she steadied her elbow with her other hand. She heard as she anticipated and dreaded, yet longed inexpressibly to hear, "Phebe!"

"Yes."

"Is it you?"

"Yes," she answered faintly.

"Will you meet me to-morrow?"

A wave of joy swept over her from head to foot. She saw Crusen waiting for her, his quiet, keen eyes watching the crowd. She had often determined to stand still and feast her eyes upon him, but she could never postpone the greater rapture when he should say, "Is it you?" or without a word link his hand in her arm. She was about to cry out, "Yes, oh, yes, anywhere!" — but a bitter flood rose in her heart and drowned her speech. She saw a rain-beaten railroad station, a desolate room, a Grimshaw with hope gone, a huge Sally lounging in a great chair, content with the gross satisfactions of the flesh. She heard the scampering of rats, the creakings of a swaying house, the thunderous undertone of the sea and listening to them, she was dumb.

"I got back from England this morning," went on Crusen, his smooth voice breaking. "I can't wait to see you. Where shall it be?"

Phebe could not answer.

"You'll surely come?"

"No," said Phebe at last slowly.

"No?"

"No," said Phebe.

"Why not?"

"I can't."

"Are you ill?"

"No."

"Do you blame me for that wretched mishap?"

"No."

"Then do as I ask!"

"No," said Phebe.

Crusen's voice grew harsh.

"Haven't you anything but 'no' to say?"

It seemed absurd to say "no" again. She said, instead, "Good-bye," and hung up the receiver; then she went creeping up the stairs and closed her door and stood aghast within. Crusen could possess her no more wholly if he had shared with her the mournful hospitality of Grimshaw. She said aloud, "Never! Never! Never!" but she believed that if Fate crossed her path with his, her wall of defense would be a wall of paper.

V

Phebe sat in her beautiful workroom. It was between Christmas and New Year, and once more snow was falling. Her day's work was done and she had a book open on her knee. She had read a passage many times and was meditating upon it. She had been desperately unhappy, more unhappy, she believed, than she had ever been, but once more she was at peace. Her mind resisted Crusen, her heart distrusted him, but her body could not forget him. Thoughts which had once pleased now revolted her, but she could not banish them. She heard and read of a new branch of medicine which exorcised by compelling the advance of forgotten things into full consciousness and even beyond the gates of speech, and the possibility of seeking help from this variety of therapy sometimes comforted her.

She read the passage aloud:

Only perhaps when the hope of love and the vision of ambition, the belief in pleasure and the luxury of grief have lost their sting do we turn to books with the contented understanding that the shadow is the reality, and the seeming reality of things is the shadow.

She was convinced for a moment that she had grasped reality. She counted the blessings which she might expect, the affection of her kin and of Gertrude, the friendship of others, travel, and, above all, books. There was for an instant a little, absent smile on her lips, such as there had been a thousand times when she had been happy. The sun was nearing its setting, and a rosy light from the sky shone into the beautiful court and the quiet room and illuminated her bright head. She breathed a long sigh, and when there was a knock at the door she looked up cheerfully.

But at once her smile faded. It was Crusen who had knocked. He came in and closed the door and stood looking about the room to assure himself that there was no one there but Phebe. It was very plain that, satisfied as he was by his scrutiny, the place had, except for its emptiness of human beings, no charm. He was almost the same Crusen, but not quite; his eyes had lost their look of intellectual keenness and there was a further alteration in the shape of his body. He was perfectly sensible of the latter change.

His gaze traveled at last to Phebe, and his expression was that of a master looking upon a loved chattel.

"Aren't you going to ask me to sit down?"

"Oh, yes," said Phebe. She stood beside her chair with her book in her hand. She held it tightly as she had long ago held "Anna Karénina."

Crusen selected the most modern of the chairs.

"Or to take off my coat? This seems to be your parlor."

Phebe did not answer his mocking.

"I went to your boarding-house to find you and I learned that you had taken a position. In the name of all nonsense why this extraordinary whim?"

"I'm earning my living."

"Why earn your living? Are you ambitious to accumulate a fortune?"

"My income has ceased and I don't know whether the business will revive. I don't care very much. I'm happier when I'm earning my living."

"You mean that you'd like to spend your days and years in a hole like this?"

Phebe's color deepened. Crusen had often said offensive things, but she had ignored them or forgiven them. This seemed intolerable.

"It isn't a hole. It has been a refuge in trouble and it's beautiful in itself."

"You mean that you like it here among these dirty books and with that old Jew and these ancient women?"

Phebe bent her head and closed her lips.

"I don't mean to insult your friends," said Crusen in a gentler tone. "I simply can't stand it to see you here. I have come to ask you to marry me. I wish it could be to-day, but I suppose no license can be had until to-morrow." He began to breathe heavily and to speak rapidly. "You may have anything, live where you like, have a house or an apartment, and your own car. I suppose this old stuff is valuable, but you may have more valuable things. You want to see the world; you may see it in every accessible inch. My days of hard work are over. I set myself long ago a certain goal and I've reached it."

Phebe did not look up.

"No," she said to herself. "No."

Crusen waited a long time.

"Did you pretend all the affection you professed?"

"No," said Phebe. "You know I didn't."

"Is there some one else?"

"No," said Phebe. "You know there is no one else."

Crusen glared at the books and the ancient pieces of furniture as though they were his sentient enemies. He began suddenly to plead.

"You were always so sweet and affectionate. You gave, you didn't wait to be asked. You have told me a thousand times that you were fond of me. You would have done anything for me before that cursed accident. There's some mystery about it — did any one annoy you?"

"No."

"Did you betray yourself?"

"No," said Phebe, her head bent still lower.

"Did your friends suspect?"

"No."

"Then I don't see why you can't forget it. You were the most sensible creature I ever knew. What has happened to you?"

Phebe saw Beulah's pale face on her pillow.

"I am older," she said faintly.

"Six months can't have changed you!" When Phebe did not answer, Crusen got to his feet. "You're in love with some one else!"

"I'm not!" Phebe straightened her shoulders and matched his harshness. "I'm done with the whole business forever. I'm not interested in anything but my work. I want to forget the very word love."

Crusen threw back his head and laughed. He meant his laugh to be simply merry, but it echoed through the room and penetrated into the store like the sharp snarl of an animal.

"There was never a more foolish word uttered since the creation. You're in love now and you know it. It isn't in you to live otherwise. You can't get on without being in love."

"I can," said Phebe, sharply. "I must."

Crusen took three steps and reached Phebe's chair. The barrier was awkward, he could not spring over it, neither could he touch her across it. He spoke in the soft tone which he had used in the railroad station before he kissed her and many times thereafter.

"Say that this is all nonsense. Come away with me. You'll be the happiest creature in the world. I know you better than you know yourself."

"No," said Phebe.

"Yes, I say."

"No," said Phebe.

"I mean to live a different life," announced Crusen insanely. "I've known many women intimately and I've been loved by them, but you're the first to whom I've offered marriage."

The life departed from Phebe's eyes. Crusen looked at her, from her bright braids to her hands clasping her book, and up again and down. It was at first a look of insolent possession, then a look of incredulity. Her resistance was incredible. She had become the chief verity of his life; he had expected of her companionship, adoration, comfort in the hideous old age which would presently leap upon him.

"Is it this crippled Jew out here?" he asked, jerking his head to one side. "Or is it that cursed Weidner?"

"There is some one at the door," said Phebe. "You will have to go."

The door opened and Ambrose and Ada Haldeman came in, Ada asking for tea. Close to the door sat Tolstoi in

his chair — had he been keeping guard? Crusen passed them all and went out. He turned and looked at Phebe meaningly and insolently. Waves of pain and passion passed over her; she remembered his arms, his eyes, his cool, smooth cheek. Her heart was, alas! not dead, and he was going now forever. She looked hopelessly at the rows of books, then back at the two faces. Ada Haldeman's was merry, and her cheeks glowed above her dark furs. Ambrose was pale and his eyes were grave. The sight of Crusen seemed to cheer the one and to disturb the other.

Phebe answered Ada's greeting and sat down to brew the tea. Separate facts, vaguely recollected, troubled her; she saw in fleeting glimpses the Millerstown hotel and the station at Reading with Crusen stepping toward Ambrose. She drove through Weidnerthal with Crusen and observed the sharp intentness of his inspection. Confused and tantalized, she could connect none of the incidents with another and still less could she banish them.

She was grateful for Ada's gay chatter, and she listened absently and passed the tea and even swallowed a little herself, and endured her guests until they left; then she went home. Was life to become one day-long desire for sleep and oblivion? She believed that she understood how death might be welcome. Perhaps to make death welcome was the effect of all human life.

Entering her room, she found Gertrude in her rocking-chair, tired and a little disheveled, but always good-natured. She had something to propose to Phebe, and she had been thinking of it all day. It made her happy, and she believed it would make Phebe happy.

"Why don't you make some money by means of your music, Phebe?"

"Here in New York, you mean?"

"Here, of course," said Gertrude. "It seems a pity for your talent to go to waste. Jerome praises you, and you say you can play the organ better than the piano. Couldn't your friend Mr. Weidner help you?"

"My friend Mr. Weidner?" repeated Phebe. "What friend Mr. Weidner?"

Gertrude sighed patiently.

"Don't look as though I were prying into your affairs! I heard you and Ada speak of Mr. Weidner and I've seen him at Tolstoi's. When you were in Millerstown he was here. Surely you remember that!"

"I don't remember it at all."

"Could I have forgotten to tell you? He said you had played the organ in his church. It was when he brought the box of cakes from your cousin Beulah."

The room began to swim round and round.

"The cakes came by mail," said Phebe.

"No, he brought them and I laid them on your table. The box was addressed, but there was no postage on it. It was on Saturday, and I said you had gone to Millerstown the day before. He looked startled; then he said he must have missed you. You're sure I didn't tell you?"

"I remember only the cakes in a box on my table when I got back on Monday," said Phebe.

"Well, he brought them from Millerstown on Saturday," insisted Gertrude. "He couldn't see how he had missed you. But that isn't the point. He has apparently a fine organ and no organist. Couldn't you play for him — for a salary, of course?"

"No," said Phebe slowly. "I couldn't play for him." Suddenly she laid hold of the post of her bed. Her mind showed again a kaleidoscopic succession of clear scenes which, however, had nothing to do with Beulah's little cakes. She

saw the Reading Station and populous Weidnerthal — there was nothing experimental in the appearance of that busy spot — and last of all Crusen's furious eyes. She had, she suspected, within her grasp a lancet which would cut Crusen forever from her heart.

"Gertrude," she said, "I'd like to talk to Mr. Weidner. I'm going to his church after dinner to see if I can find him."

"That's right," said Gertrude, rising a little stiffly. "I'll walk down with you and patrol the block. The old Nick is in me. I'm nervous as a cat."

"I must see him alone," stipulated Phebe plainly.

"I understand," said Gertrude with the amiability which was the core of her heart.

VI

GERTRUDE and Phebe went southward arm in arm, taking the shortest course through narrow, dark, and snowy streets. Gertrude's weariness brought her almost to the point of hysteria. Once she stood still and laughed.

"Flora has a new assistant. To-day some one asked for cheerful reading for a nervous invalid, and she recommended 'The House of Mirth,' 'The Red Laugh,' and 'The Red Badge of Courage.'" Gertrude dropped into mouth-filling slang. "Wouldn't that jar you? 'The Red Laugh' for a person with a bad case of neurasthenia!"

Phebe scarcely heard. She, too, was tired, and the step from the pavement to the street seemed precipitous and from the street up to the pavement impossibly high. At the corner near Ambrose's church, Gertrude drew her hand away.

"I'll walk slowly toward the left, and when you come out you walk toward the right. We'll meet eventually."

"Very well," said Phebe.

The shades in Ambrose's study were raised and Phebe could see him at his desk. He sat as quietly as the figures

of the learned gentlemen above his head and he seemed as ecclesiastical and remote. His hand moved across a page; he was doubtless writing one of the essays which were making him famous. A shaded lamp illuminated his moving hand and his fine, quiet face.

Phebe rang the bell, and in a moment he stood looking at her, amazed.

"Why, is it you? Come in."

Phebe hesitated on the doorstep. "I want to see you for only a minute. I have something to ask you."

The door opened still wider.

"Come to my study," said Ambrose, moving back to let her pass. "Let me take your coat."

"No," said Phebe breathlessly. "I can't stay."

"But you'll sit down?"

Phebe selected a chair near the door and perched on its edge. The room was lovely with its books and paneling and firelight and lamplight. A narcissus was in bloom on Ambrose's desk.

"My friend Gertrude Dennis is waiting for me."

"Won't she come in?"

Phebe did not hear. "Will you tell me what you think of Mr. Crusen?" she asked abruptly.

Ambrose stood before the fireplace, his arm resting on the low shelf. Through his body passed with the swiftness of lightning some impulse which stiffened and straightened it. He looked at Phebe, then into the fire.

"You've asked me a hard question."

"But you'll answer it," said Phebe.

Ambrose said nothing.

"I beg you to answer," said Phebe earnestly. "And to answer honestly."

"I shouldn't like to hurt you."

"Nothing can hurt me."

Ambrose frowned; then he began to speak, still looking into the fire.

"You know the conditions under which I was brought up; that is, you may guess at part of them. I was always anxious to live decently and wholly unable to gratify my desire. The little church and the Christian Endeavor meetings were the only good influences I had. Through the kindness of Mr. Weygandt and others, I was able to go to college. When my father died, I was left with certain obligations which I chose to assume; certain persons became dependent upon me. I can't hope that you don't know the wretched story. I could not entirely abandon poor Ilka and her child.

"At this time Crusen sought me out and spoke to me kindly, pretending to be my friend. He had explored the mine on the land which I had inherited and he persuaded me to accept rent for it — two hundred dollars a year. It seemed like a fortune; it enabled me to stay at school and at the same time to do something to make the lives of those I have spoken of tolerable. On my twenty-first birthday I signed a contract for seven years, and since then I have received less than two thousand dollars. Crusen has cleared at the lowest estimate a hundred thousand."

"And he gave you no more than he agreed?"

"That is what he gave me."

"Did he know that you needed it?"

"You misunderstand," said Ambrose. "I wasn't a candidate for charity. He got the contract fraudulently, by deceiving an ignorant boy. The money is mine, whether I need it or not."

"And you can do nothing?"

"Nothing."

"You have tried?"

"Yes."

Phebe seemed to hear Heimbach crying, "Rascal! Scoundrel! Thief!" She seemed to have heard him for a long time.

"Is this known in Millerstown?"

"It is now."

Phebe looked curiously at Ambrose. Either by a fairy gift at birth, or by acquirement as the plant acquires strength from the black soil from which it springs, he possessed certain virtues — stability, fortitude, gentleness which was not weakness, and a purity of soul which was not that of ignorance or innocence or blindness or youth. They were virtues which she did not attach to a lover, but she would like to have them in a friend. She spoke clearly, her face tingling.

"Beulah gave you a box for me, and when you delivered it, Gertrude told you that I was in Millerstown and you knew that I was not there and had not been there. Where did you think I was?"

Ambrose's cheeks flamed. "It was not my business to guess where you were."

"Did you wonder?" asked Phebe.

"Perhaps I did," he said at last slowly.

"I was to have met Mr. Crusen," said Phebe, rising as though to fling her confession at him and be gone. "A flood came and the trains were blocked. I spent the night alone in a hotel in New Jersey. The next night I was in Millerstown. All other nights of my life I have been accounted for."

"I could not have suspected you of wrongdoing," said Ambrose. He looked at Phebe as Aunt Cassie looked long ago when Phebe stood in the doorway watching Beulah being married. Suddenly Phebe felt hot tears of envy

under her eyelids and knew that in a moment they would run down her cheeks.

"You were too unsuspicious," she said in a light, hard tone. "If a flood hadn't interfered, I should have been done for." She went toward the door.

"No," said Ambrose, following her, "not done for. Where are you going?"

"To meet Gertrude, then home to sleep."

"Let me walk with you."

"No," said Phebe, "it isn't necessary."

In the dark outer hall she fumbled with the latch and Ambrose laid his hand upon it.

"Won't you come back soon and play the organ?" he asked. "You can't fail to find pleasure in that."

Phebe stood motionless. It seemed to her suddenly that an organ was more than an instrument upon which to work out problems of harmony or tone or technique; it was a voice with which to express the longings of one's soul.

"I'd like to," she said at last.

"If you come on Sunday, you'll find a large congregation," said Ambrose. "I think they must have heard of your playing and they live in hope."

"They've heard of your writing," said Phebe. "I suppose you're going to give up the ministry."

"No," said Ambrose. "If I give up either, it will be the writing."

The door was open and the cold air struck Phebe's cheek.

"Do you think one can start all over again at my age?" she asked tremulously.

"That is one of the chief miracles of your religion," said Ambrose.

Phebe was about to say, "It isn't my religion," but she said instead, "Good-bye."

On the pavement she turned confusedly to the left, and Gertrude came running after her.

"Luckily I was just at the corner," she gasped. "I said the right, stupid!"

Phebe caught her arm and fell into step.

"Gertrude," she said, "how do you live without happiness?"

"I have happiness," declared Gertrude explosively. "Unless you mean the specific happiness of being in love or married."

"That's exactly what I mean," answered Phebe honestly.

"Look about you," said Gertrude, motioning as though her friends were scattered as exhibitions in the deserted street. "Think of the women in our house! Think of Ada Haldeman! Do you think they're all unhappy?"

Phebe hesitated. "I hope not."

"And there's Tolstoi; he's not merely a dealer in old books, he's a noble gentleman. There's Jerome; when you hear him play you know he's got a heart. No doubt your Mr. Weidner belongs in the same class. How do you suppose all the unmarried live?"

"I don't know," said Phebe.

Gertrude quickened her pace as though, having stated her problem, she might proceed actively to solving it.

"I'll tell you. Some go on hoping with the aid of rouge, powder, lampblack, sage tea, etc. Some let themselves get feeble-minded like Carter. The wise get down to brass tacks; in other words, my precious purist, they toil, they spin."

"Have you been unhappy?"

"I!" Gertrude stopped short, then stepped on briskly. "Nobody ever had anything on me for unhappiness. But I'm cured. I thank my stars."

"There are other things," said Phebe hesitatingly.

"Dreadful things. Things that have happened. Evil imaginings."

"Sure," said Gertrude. "Of course. Naturally. Everybody has 'em. Wild beasts. Work's the whip to keep 'em under. Some idiots go and show the whole menagerie to doctors, even all their dreams. All nonsense; they've only given themselves away."

Phebe had looked at Miss Preston's body with no more cruel eyes than she now looked at Phebe Stannard's soul.

"Gertrude," she said, "will you tell me how I seem to you, what I seem to be and to have done?"

"Certainly," said Gertrude obligingly. "You seem to me to be young, vigorous, and intelligent, with enough beauty to get along. You've cut your eye teeth. You've prepared yourself for the business of life, you've learned wisdom, and you've landed the most interesting job in New York. There's nobody I'd rather be than you."

Phebe laughed hysterically, her foot on the Dennis step. Impelled by what an antipodal motive had she prepared herself for the business of life! By what a queer winding, hidden road had she gained wisdom!

"The business of my life is hard work, with music and art and travel on the side," Gertrude went on. "You don't call that unhappiness?"

"I call the business of my life at this moment sleep," answered Phebe. "I'm done up."

"Perhaps you can have contentment with love," said Gertrude doubtfully. "But I know you can have it without. Contentment is what you want.

> "'If I am peaceful, I shall see
> Beauty's face continually;
> Feeding on her wine and bread
> I shall be wholly comforted.'

I'm fed up on this talk about beauty, but that's sound logic. And keep your head up, 'bloody but unbow'd' as 'twere. You get me?"

Phebe stood motionless. As on the Granger cliff she felt a thrill of elation. When her sore heart healed, she would refurnish it, this time with treasures which no one could take from her. Thus, and thus only, could she be above the threat of disaster.

"You get me?" queried Gertrude again.

"I get you," said Phebe, and opened the door, convinced that she entered a new world. She was, poor Phebe, a little over twenty-seven years old.

THE END

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